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ZDENKA

by

Helena A. Smith

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CHAPTER ONE

Brno, Czechoslovakia

October 2, 1937

I decided to keep a journal, as friend and confidante, if only to remind me of how I got into this awful mess. The trouble is, I don't even know exactly why and how it has happened. I have no one I dare confide in, to turn to for advice (certainly no advice I would care to take), least of all my husband Karel. After two years of marriage, Karel and I have never shared our deepest thoughts, only the pleasures of traveling, skiing, entertaining friends, going to the opera. Nothing else has really mattered in our lives. Indeed we've had not time for anything else. But there is a new man who came into my life.

Somehow I shall have to tell Karel. I could just flatly announce, some morning after breakfast, "Karel, I am no longer in love with you," but that isn't really the way it is. I feel the same about him now as I always did. I like him and want him as a friend, but have never been in love with him. Oh, how much easier it would be if he had beaten me, or been unfaithful. But no—he is in love with me, says he adores me (which I admit I enjoy) and gives in to my every whim. We have a lovely home,

beautiful friends, and wonderful times together. What more could any girl want?

But good sense has suddenly flown out the window. Shall I tell Karel: "My dear husband, dear friend, I have unfortunately taken leave of my senses. I want to divorce you, for I have fallen in love for the first time in my life"? And what would Karel say? Now, as I consider this, I find myself trembling, and my eyes begin to ache. It occurs to me that I don't want to know what Karel might say.

Surely I must be the most miserable person in Brno—though there is little misery in this lovely town. I have it! After I write this out, I shall hand it to Karel and say: "Karel, I want you to read this. It is very important to both of us. Then, not right away, but after you have had time to hink it all over, we can have a talk about it. OK?" So I shall write my heart out, so that finally he will understand. Understand what is best for me, for him, for both of us.

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Several days have passed since everything seemed so hopeless. I did not stop brooding and trying to find an answer to my painful thoughts. I was trying to penetrate my inner soul. I had to admit to myself that I had made a mistake--a mistake with frightful consquences. How could I have known? But after all, I had never been in love before, nor had I been in love with Karel. And while I was searching for a sensible answer, I went back, far back into my childhood--perhaps that I would find a reasonable answer--my childhood which I had lost so suddenly and paiufully at an untimely early age. I was six years old. It was a gray autumn day in 1927 when I was forced to say goodbye to my beloved father. He was leaving in a waiting taxi to enter a hospital in Vienna to be operated on an incurable cancer and an operation from which he never returned. His farewell look sank deep into my memory, never to leave me.

After father's death mother's fragile health seemed to turn for the worse. When my governess called me in the middle of the night, coaxing me into mother's bedroom to say a last brief goodbye, it was already too late. I couldnot bear to look at the motionless body of my mother and ran out of the room. Back in my room, I buried my face deep in my pillow and sobbed uncontrollably.

Mother had for many years suffered TB. In order to avoid our severe seasons she had spent many winters in a TB sanitarium in Italy. Because of her illness mother had never kissed me,

something that I did not understand. "My mother does not love me," was my interpretation,

During the days that followed her death my memories remained rather hazy, except for a short moment after the funeral services when an unknown person had put her arm around my shoulder and said "poor child." At that instant I did not realize what that meant. From that time many changes occurred.

Uncle Philip became our legal guardian. Our governess was dismissed. That sudden separation caused me an additional heart-ache. A distant relative who apparently had felt sorry for us moved into our home. She became our beloved and very patient Auntie Mathilda. Our grandmother--mother's griefstricken mother also loved us. She owned a business that dealt with raw animal furs. The small town, Boskovice, she lived in was only a short distance from our home town, Brno. Her business took her to Brno every week. After conferences with the representatives of her branch, she came to our house. The visits were always hectic but infinitely heartwarming, even though she had to hurry back home by the last available train.

One day I was told that a rich lady in our neighborhood wanted to adopt me. I fought strongly against that plan until I won. That was my first victory of many that followed.

In order to keep us two children, my older brother and me, together in our house, it was decided to allow father's textile factory to be managed by two cousins until my brother Milan's eighteenth birthday, when he would decide whether to take over the factory or to chose a different profession. A big apartment

house that our parents owned was to be sold and the proceeds invested, the income from which would be used for our support.

I spent my summer vacation in grandmother's house, where I fully enjoyed the little town, a medieval Jewish ghetto that was surrounded by dense forests and lakes. Grandma opened my eyes to the beauty of nature and the animal world that I only had seen in pictures in my schoolbooks. She surrounded me not only with infinite tenderness but also introduced me to the beautiful old synagogue and prayers.

After four years in the public school, I was sent to the German Humanistic Gymnasium. I studied German, Czech, Latin and Greek. Privately I was taught in English and French. One winter vacations I was allowed to join the famous Hannes Schneider Ski School on the Arlberg in Austria, where I discovered my great love to this sport.

After our graduation, Milan chose to study chemistry and prepared to become a pharmacist. The exhilaration at my successful graduation and the feeling that the whole world belonged to me was very short. Our uncles decided to sell the factory. Their plan was to buy a pharmacy for my brother and me and that I also study for that field.

This was the second moment in my short life that I revolted. I went to Italy. I wented to see the Mediterranean Sea and walk in the footsteps of my mother and bring to order the turmoil of my inner thoughts. It was a happy decision. I gloried in sitting on the shore, watching the change of the tides, and breathing in

the salty ocean air, mingled with the fragrance of the lemon and orange bushes in bloom.

I decided to study medicine. On my return to Brno, I was overjoyed when my uncles agreed with my decision. Yet I had one more hurdle to overcome. My uncles' opinion was the German University in Prague was out of the question. "A young girl does not live alone in a strange city." They won and I had to stay in Brno and matriculate in the Czech university. There I was confronted with almost insurmontable difficulties. The scientific language In Czech was a foreign language for me, especially chemistry.

One day, when handling a colorless liquid, which later turned out to be Sulfuric Acid, I suddenly felt sick. It was not the consquence of my careless handling of the poisonous acid but rather from a septicemia which I had contracted in handling a corpse in the anatomy department. Unfortunately, the excruciating pains which I felt during my illness, returned each time I entered the anatomy hall. On my professor's advice I decided to drop my studies.

Shortly afterwards I could overhear in a converstation my uncles' fatal words, "Zdenka will soon celebrate her eighteenth birthday and will be old enough to get married. What shall we do with her?" Uncle Philip answered in a matter of fact, "Oh, I have a husband for her." Uncle Emil seemed relieved and asked. "Whom do you have in mind?" "Frantisek Basch. He would be perfect, he is a serious businessman, a bachelor and seems to be looking

for a suitable bride." Good God, that's it! My body got cold and stiff. That old and dried-out prune, I thought. He must be at least twice my age! Only over my dead body!

Triumphantly I celebrated my eighteenth birthday with my last revolt and decided to propose to Karel to get married. He agreed happily.

The following weeks passed with hectic preparations. Central heating was being installed, a new kitchen and modern bathroom built, old doors were knocked out and with bigger ones replaced. The architect designed beautiful furniture which was going to be manufactured in a factory. My nervous tension dominated the atmosphere wishing to disappear as fast as possible.

Our simple wedding ceremony took place in the City Hall, in the presence of only Auntie Mathilda and Milan as witnesses. We had decided to spend the honeymoon in Venice, the favorite place of European newly-weds. To see Venice for the first time was an unforgettable impression. We enjoyed in total enrapture the uniqueness of that beautiful city and promised ourselves never to forget the enchantment that surrounded us there.

At our return to Brno we settled down to our daily routines. I did not find time to reflect over my life. Our social activities were hectic, pleasant and superficial. But the sudden appearance of Max into my life changed everything. I lost my mental equilibrium. I fought without success all restraints and succumbed to ny inner drive and Max's charm.

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"Put me down, Max. This is serious." I tried to remember the words I'd rehearsed but my thoughts were scrambled dizzily, as they so often were when I was with Max.

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CHAPTER TWO

May 2, 1938

Paris

Two weeks in this heady city and already I feel very much a Parisian! Pavel, when he is not busy, shows me the sights; when he is busy I explore on my own.

He is still the same Pavel I remember from our teen years. Paris hasn't changed him at all. Still tousle-haired, merry-eyed, quick to smile or laugh. Slender as a girl, but lots of muscle. Still loves to tease.

Our apartment is on top of Montmartre with a spectacular view. It is in one of several pavillons in a garden complex housing a colony of artists who are as eager as I am to exchange greetings and small talk.

"How did you find this charming place?" I asked Pavel the other day.

"Our cousin Lydia used it as her pied à terre during her theatrical engagements here in Paris. When she returned to Prague she sublet it to me." Lydia has been very popular with the neighbors, and I seem to have inherited their affection. So because of all this, and Pavel, I am much less lonely than in Brno.

Sometimes I make the meal, sometimes Pavel makes it, but most often we make it together--laughing, improvising, inventing. He knows of course that I have divorced Karel, but doesn't press for details, thank God. I'm not yet ready for that. He is very sensitive, and I don't think he would ever knowingly hurt another human being. I also think he would not like to take responsibility for someone else's life, although he is unfailingly kind. Perhaps this is why we get along beautifully together. Neither of us asks too much of the other, nor tries to give too much.

This evening I went up again to enjoy the view from our roof-garden. As far as one can see, the typical Parisian rooftops with their ubiquitous chimneys spread out below our apartment. At twilight everything shades into pinks and purples, then gradually to gray. Thousands of softly glowing lights appear, and the city metamorphoses from its business-like daytime persona to its gayer, more intimate face. No wonder the artists have taken possession of this place. A block away are the luminous signs of the famous Moulin de la Galette nightclub. Each midnight we hear the blaring of Offenbach's Can Can, signalling the dance time is over. One could set one's clock by it. Pavel jokingly says the music lulls him into sweet sleep, until the sudden silence after midnight wakes him up.

Often in the mornings I walk down from Montmartre through the narrow, steep streets to the rue Lepic, where fresh vegetables and fruit are displayed in open markets. My explorations take me to the Opera, the Madeleine, the other architectural marvels Paris is so famous for. I revel in the stores on the Boulevards--the rue de la Paix with its jewelry shops, the Place Vendome with its central column, flanked by the imposing Hotel Ritz, the adjacent windows of Chanel, and the priceless dazzling window displays of van Clef and Arpels. I have become the princess in the fairy tale—and am loving every minute of it. The weather is beautiful, although unusually hot for the season. Frequently the heels of my shoes get stuck in the soft asphalt, and I feel an almost human tug.

We often have visitors—friends, and friends of friends—who have heard about our studio with the splendid view. Everybody wants to admire Paris from our roof garden. At these informal gatherings we talk endlèssly, consume coffee and cakes, and even dance to the music from the nightclub.

Pavel is friendly with the Arbide family next door. Their daughter,

Michelle, who is my age, is exceptionally friendly, charming and very pretty. The day I had to go to the police to apply for a residence permit, she accompanied me and, thanks to her help, everything was arranged. Her parents, a witty and intelligent couple in their early forties, have accepted me as another daughter, and are pleased that Michelle has found a friend nearby. They have modern views but are somewhat overprotective of Michelle. She is an only child, very sensitive, not quite typical of the young bourgeois French female.

June 1, 1938

I now have to think seriously about my future, study something, find a useful activity. I have decided to learn the cosmetics business,—practical. I finally settled on a good school on the rue de la Paix.

Every course accommodates about fifteen students, mainly foreign and lasts six months, terminating with a diploma./The school is said to open all the right doors. The teacher, a friendly and good-humored Russian emigré, introduced me to the lively group, young women mostly in their twenties. The learning is easy, the manual work clean and at times even amusing. We learn facial and body massage—manicure, pedicure, and body care, plus a little about anatomy. And, of course, everything the beauty industry manufactures, and their use.

July 1, 1938

I have made several friends already, There is Peggy, who is English, divorced, and looking for a boyfriend; Doris, who has a lot of money, came to Paris from Australia, hoping to find some impoverished aristocrat (he doesn't necessarily have to be impoverished, nor does he

have to be an aristocrat, she quipped) who would not mind following her to the immense ranch she will inherit from an aging uncle. "I am only taking the course to pass the time and to give my parents a reason for may extended stay here," she added. Françoise, the only French girl in the class, is a little older, and much quieter than the rest of us. Veronika, a lovely twenty-year old blonde from Norway, is the daughter of a clergyman, her motther a school-teacher, properly brought up and shy, innocent, charmingly unsophisticated.

The school is only a couple of blocks from the famous Café de la Paix, our frequent hangout. I love the lively conversations, jokes and general needling. At times we talk politics and everybody has a different opinion, each of us mildly representing the views of her own country. Peggy is convinced peace will be sustained, and Doris has a naive outlook on European politics. It is a jolly group, light-hearted and optimistic. Sometimes Pavel joins us and brings his own friends. The other day it was Franta Dohnal, an older friend from Prague who is the French representative of the famous Czech shoe firm, Bata. Franta is a cheeful fellow who possesses wide knowledge of life in Paris.

Multitudes of people pass by the Café de la Paix—it is "de rigueur" for every foreigner not only to walk by but to sit down at least for a "tasse de café." Once in a while one of us unexpectedly meets a compatriot, from London, from Sydney, Prague or Vienna.

Last week I met a rather charming emigre from Austria, Dr. Franz Schindler. He is in his mid-thirties, I would judge, urbane, and seems to have a way with the ladies, dazzling us with his cosmopolitan charm. He is little too smooth for my taste—but he is an emigré, so I invited him to come home and meet Pavel.

July 4, 1938

Last night Pavel and I entertained a number of friends at our first planned party. Everybody helped out and the party was a smashing success.

Pavel bought a few bottles of wine and cookies from the corner patisserie. Franta stormed in with a wide grin on his face, and said: "I know one is supposed to bring a token to the lady of the house, so I brought two good friends." He introduced Arpad and Imre, brothers from Hungary. At the same time he placed a magnum of champagne on the table. A moment later, Dr. Schindler arrived, ceremoniously presenting me with a bunch of pink carnations.

"Flowers for me? Dr. Schindler! How formal!"

Glancing casually at Peggy and Doris I saw that they had pulled the Hungarian brothers into conversation. Everything was going smoothly. I turned to Franta.

"Are you traveling a lot?" I asked.

"Yes, more than I like. Even though my headquarters are in Paris, I am not here long enough. My time is spent between North Africa, Egypt and, of course, Europe."

"Do your travels ever take you back to Czechoslovakia?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I was recently there and visited Brno, which reminds me, I met one of your friends,—Vlasta. She talked about you."

"Yes, Vlasta is my best girl friend. We went to school together. Karel, my ex-husband and I introduced her to his best friend and shortly afterward they married."

I watched Veronika helping Pavel with the wine. Great, I thought, they seem to get along beautifully. Michelle, meanwhile, sat throughout the evening on the floor, in a corner with Dr. Schindler, engaged in deep conversation. I wondered what they had in common.

Peggy, who right away had taken Arpad in tow, in a moment of respite whispered to me, "Wow! What a handsome man! Do they all come in that size?" And Doris, upon leaving, whispered to me at the door, "These Hungarians certainly are gorgeous specimens. Not only that, he is even interested in Australian sheep stations. Imre is taking me home. The rest I'll tell you tomorrow."

Today was schoolday again and at lunch the conversation revolved around the party. Everyone was in a good mood, evidently from the new friendships that had been generated the night before.

At our gatherings in the Café, as we get to know each other better, I am sometimes teased to open up and share my own intimate thoughts, and always jokingly respond with an equivocal answer. There is no point in going over an old pain, the scars of which are made up of bitterness and disgust. I have been liberated since the day I was sitting with Pavel in the Café, enjoying my good luck to be in Paris, when an old friend from Brno--Maria Lenz--spotted me and joined us. I listened hungrily to all her news, realizing how much I missed home. For a brief moment I closed my eyes and saw my home, my loved ones, the place where I felt I belonged.

"Zdenka—this might interest you," Maria had said, with a hint of a malicious smile. "Max got caught with our friend Hanna, and consequently her husband immediately asked for a divorce, and forced him to marry her—it was the talk of the town. He couldn't get out of that one!"

I felt an icy layer settling down in my chest. Under the table I was clenching my fists and my nails cut deeply into flesh. Slowly I moved out of my chair, trying to sound cool and detached.

"It's getting late and I have to get back to school. When are you going back home?"

"Tomorrow."

"Well, say hello to everybody. Good to see you again. Have a good trip."

I walked the rest of the day through streets I had not walked before, unaware of my surroundings. What an irony of fate. Wandering through the unknown streets I was lost in a profusion of memories. Unrestrained tears ran down my cheeks as I reached the Pont Neuf, where I stood for a long time staring down into the slow moving Seine.

"Don't be silly," I scolded myself. "You got over it a long time ago. Forget that episode! You're not the only woman in the world who has suffered rejection by a man she loved." I argued with myself until my head cleared. "You see, he was not worth your infatuation." Resolutely I hailed a taxi home.

uly 20, 1938 The news from home indicates that the political horizon is clouding up again, with Czechoslovakia very much in the center of the storm. Hitler's voracious appetite for small countries knows no limits, and his tirades before delirious masses point now to my little country. There have been skirmishes between Czechs and Sudets in the past, mostly instigated by German provocateurs. Compared with minority parties in other countries, those in Czechoslovakia are well off. They enjoy not only all civil rights, as well as being able to maintain their cultural institutions, such as their own schools, theaters and newspapers. The Sudets have prospered, and over the years have gradually reached a state of relative harmony with the Czechs, although calling incessantly for yet more autonomy.

ugust 20, 1938

Love is in the air! Veronika has fallen for Pavel, and Michelle is infatuated with Dr. Schindler. Everything is happening so fast these days—as if a film reel has been speeded up to a dizzying pace—as if people do not expect to see a tomorrow.

Breaking out of her customary reticence, Veronika has made a rather startling confession. Slightly embarrassed, she tells me that she loves Pavel and does not mind at all having lost her virginity to him. She is very religious and had guarded her virginity for her future husband, who she now feels sure will be Pavel. I sense that Pavel is uncomfortable, although I believe he loves her. He is an exchange business student and unable to work in France. The law is strictly enforced and marriage under such circumstances is out of the question. Veronika is impressionable, not to be taken lightly, but what kind of future could he offer? What difficult times we are living in when we can't even choose our mates, but have to depend on world events.

Veronika has suggested that Pavel go with her to Norway. She is sure her father would receive them with open arms, but Pavel shakes his head and tactfully changes the subject.

I am even more uneasy about Michelle, since I have come to trust Franz Schindler less and less. Call it intuition, if you will, but I rather think it is experience. He comes often now to our evening gatherings, and is usually found holding hands with Michelle.

"I have applied for a Uruguayan visa and do hope to be able to work there as a physician," he said one evening. "But I am afraid that even

this South American country will make a lot of difficulties." Michelle did not like to hear that. She was afraid to lose him so soon. Pavel, who had just come in and had only caught the last words of Dr. Schindler, broke in, with a bitter tone in his voice,

"It is remarkable how important these little countries have become in the last couple of years. Until now they were only flyspecks on a map. Who would have thought to take them seriously?"

The soirées with our group of young central European refugees are a new experience for Michelle. She had previously known only Frenchmen of her own age, and only in a very casual way. She sees us as people with real problems and afflictions, wrenched from our normal lives by a mob of megalomanical gangsters. She is very impressionable, and Schindler seems to be taking advantage of this, knowing how to impress people and elicit feelings of admiration. He cajoles her and ingratiates himself with her. It has not taken long for her to fall head over heels in love with him. I think she would follow him anywhere and I feel a certain responsibility for bringing them together.

The other day I told her, "Your place is here with your parents, in your own country. You don't have to fear anything, you are French and not Jewish. You're the only child, and it would break your parents' heart if you were to leave."

"But Zdenka, I love him. I want to spend the rest of my life with him. I can't remain my parents' child forever."

"But what can you hope for in a foreign country? With a relatively strange man? After all, you have known him only a short time. You don't know his background."

Michelle listened patiently to my preaching tirade, and only sighed.

Am I being wrong to try to dissuade her? Am I, perhaps being too cynical and suspicious because of my own bitter betrayal by Max? And would I have listened, then, to any well-intentioned—whether right or wrong—advice? I guess she will have to go her own way. God help her.

August 28, 1938

Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, has sent Lord Runciman to Czechoslovakia to mediate in the Sudeten crisis. Everybody knows it is absurd. Henlein, the Sudeten leader is only Hitler's puppet, not in a position to negotiate between the Czech Government and the Sudets. It's obvious that Runciman's presence in Czechoslovakia is a cover-up for the secession of the Sudetenland.

September 30, 1938

All Europe had awaited Hitler's words at the Nuremberg party rally. They were packed with hatred against the Czech state and President Beneš. Hitler stops short of declaring war but demands "justice" be given to the "poor oppressed" Sudeten Germans. His words caused a revolt in the Sudeten which the Czechs quelched by using troops and declaring martial law. Henlein fled across the border. In Germany he proclaimed the ceding of the Sudetenland to Germany would be the only solution. Everybody knows that in ceding the Sudetenland to Germany, the Czechs would lose both their natural mountain defenses as well as their own fortifications, and be at the prey of the Nazis. Yet the French are pressing the Czechs to make concessions, and Chamberlain has gone to Berchtesgaden to appeal personally to Hitler. Everyone's ears are glued to the radio. Pavel and I are holding our breath.

October 12, 1938

Things are moving so fast now it is hard to keep track of them. Czechoslovakia and Germany have declared a general mobilization, and the French have followed suit with a partial mobilization. The British are urging the Czechs to accept Hitler's conditions. President Roosevelt has appealed to Hitler to seek a peaceful solution.

Our beloved President Beneš has resigned. It had become clear that his life was in danger, so he has flown to England and exile. I fear this blow could be fatal to the Czech nation. Its national existence may be in jeopardy. I very much fear a war. Now will the people of Czechoslovakia wake up?

Franz Schindler is leaving for Uruguay where he hopes to set up as a physician. Before he left I saw him kiss Michelle, in an almost fatherly way, and promised to write immediately upon his arrival. After that, he would write at least once a week, and send for her as soon as he is established. They were oblivious of my presence. Michelle has been crying almost non-stop ever since, as if she never expects to see him again.

November 11, 1938

In the midst of our "graduation" celebration a frightening event has cast a terrible shadow over all of us. The papers have been full of the news of the assassination of a German embassy employee by a young Jew, and the Germans haven't missed the opportunity for revenge with hideous atrocities. The Nazi government inspired acts of enraged violence, and then retaliated by annihilating thousands of innocent Jews all over their territory. Plundering of stores, dragging whole families out of their homes, beatings and killings. The papers call it "Crystal Night,"

and paralyzing fear grips everyone. The refugees in France draw closer together, seeking an illusion of safety. Our conversation is mainly on emigration, not giving up hope of finding a country, no matter how small or far away, that will grant us a visa.

November 28, 1938

On this morning of a gray, cold day, I was running a bit late for school. Big, dry leaves from the plane trees which had fallen overnight covered the streets, rustling under my hurrying feet. Concierges of the apartment houses were busily sweeping the streets and washing the sidewalks with soapy water mixed with "l'eau Javel," shoving the dirty mess into the gutter. I had to keep a watchful eye in order not to be splashed on. The sting of the strong liquid irritated my nostrils. Hastily I bought the daily paper at the corner, threw a quick smile at the vendor, and reached the nearby Metro station just as the train was pulling in. Inside the car I found a seat and opened the paper. The black headlines leapt out at me like the approaching funnel of a tornado,

HITLER ANNEXES THE SUDETENLAND!

My eyes filled with tears. I dropped the paper in my lap and cried all the way to school.

When I arrived, Françoise noticed my red, swollen eyes.

"What in the world's happened to you?" she asked.

Afraid to trust my voice, I showed her the headlines. Françoise put her arms around me, embraced me, and patted me gently on the back.

"I understand how it must be for you. Please don't worry. I am your friend, and should you not be able to go home anymore, you can always stay with me. I don't have much, but we'll manage."

I am overwhelmed by Francoise's compassion and generosity. I feel sure she means it. How touching and how humbling it is to find such understanding, such warmth and spontaneous willingness to help. And we have not even been close firends—just people thrown together by chance.

December 12, 1938

Yesterday I bumped into Fred, my Austrian skiing partner from Kitzbühel. It was only last year, though it seems a lifetime ago.

I noticed he wasn't as impeccably dressed as I remembered him, and now, as we sat together in a coffee shop, that black-brown future he had predicted is already upon us, I wondered what he was doing here in Paris.

"Absolutely nothing," he replied, "except killing time and hoping for a visa to the United States or Australia."

Later, over dinner at our home, Fred told us of the dark events in Austria since the Anschluss. His father, whose crime was to be a Jew and a successful lawyer, was detained in Dachau concentration camp, rounded up along with eighty thousand other "unreliables." Fred too had seen the inside of Dachau but, by some incomprehensible quirk of fate, had been released after a few months, and had left Austria as fast as he could. As he talked, his face was pained, and he nervously twisted a handkerchief. I sensed the memories that engulfed him, the hardest.

December 26, 1938

Pavel insisted that as many friends as possible celebrate Christmas Eve together. He expected friends from London—a couple on their honeymoon—and others who make this a yearly event and count on his arrangements. Everyone came; Veronika, Fred, Michelle, Franta, the Hungarina friends, and Doris.

The party can best be described as a happy-sad affair. We

visited a sumptuous restaurant on the Place Clichy. It was crowded and noisy. Shortly before midnight we moved back home to toast the future in champagne.

Veronika, of course, didn't leave Pavel's side and Michelle must have been thinking of Franz. The only happy one seemed to be Doris. Imre will accompany her to Australia and she is sure they'll get married.

"He applied for an Australian visa" she said to me, holding in one hand a glass of champagen and in the other a piece of cake, "and should they make difficulties, we get married here." When Pavel asked Imre for a cigarette, he flashed a brand-new golden cigarette case and offered him one. Doris whispered to me, "It is my Christmas present to him."

She knows how to manipulate a man, I thought. Good for her!

Fred was quiet and told me: "I am trying to forget the past holidays and wonder where I'll spend my next one. I am not sorry to leave this continent. This part of my life is over and belongs here. I'm ready for the next chapter."

It was three o'clock when the party finally broke up. There was nothing left to keep us together. The champagne of our many toasts was wearing off and could no longer diguise the artificial gaiety of the past hours. After the friends left, I stepped on the terrace. The air was clear and wintry, the lights sparkled and seemed to compete with the stars. The moon was momentarily cutting through a few rushing clouds. I shivered and turned back inside.

December 27, 1938

International news becomes more and more disquieting. I have decided to try to go home and make financial arrangements, the transfer of some money. If possible I shall sell the houses. My packing should be easy, as I shall leave most of my things here.

January 1, 1939

Brno! Oh, to breathe that familiar air, walk through the familiar streets and see familiar faces. Paris is Paris, but here is my home, and I have almost decided to stay for good. The house I grew up in, that wonderfully cozy place, full of over-stuffed sofas, oil paintings, shelves of familiar books, the piano and the antique clocks: Every piece evokes half-forgotten incidents which remind me that I belong here. My friends are all eager to hear about Parisian life, and treat me like a celebrity.

I am amazed at the unconcerned life style of my friends. The rumbles of the gathering storm are being completely ignored. They continue to believe there will be peace because they want to believe it. Be that as it may, I am home on a visit and since they won't listen to me anyway, I shall join them in their pleasures.

Last Wednesday, at a lavish party held in my honor by Vlasta, I was introduced to a compatriot, an interesting man named Tomas Munk, an old friend of Vlasta's husband Jiři.

"How come I haven't met you before?" Tomas asked.

"I was in Paris the last eight months."

"Why don't we sit down in that quiet corner, where we'll be more comfortable and less interrupted?"

Taking me by my arm he pulled up chairs and seemingly relaxed. He sat down crossing his legs and resting his arms in his lap. My attention was first drawn to his hands--slim and expressive. I stared at them,

fascinated, recalling similar hands on the paintings of Old Masters. Next, I looked into his face, thin lines around his brown eyes, obviously from frequent laughter, and a straight nose; the wide sensuous mouth partly overshadowed by a dark-blond mustache. He has confidence and sincerity, I thought. I learned that he had acquired his doctorate in Prague and was about to start a two-year term with a hospital in the Belgian Congo.

"It won't be easy, but it will be a challenge," he confided. "I'm sure I will learn a lot and gain excellent experience. I'm very interested in tropical diseases. Besides, two years is not long in a lifetime."

"You are lucky, Tomas, you have an interesting profession and will be able to do something worthwhile with it. I almost envy you." I thought of my unpreparedness for life and non-existence of a real profession. Before we could continue our conversation, Vlasta joined us. She seemed in a hurry and somewhat confused.

"I'm sorry, Zdenka, but Karel just walked in—with a peroxide blonde."

At first, I was ill at ease, but the presence of Dr. Munk helped me. Not knowing, he instilled courage in me. Karel and I stared at each other for a fraction of a second, then exchanged civil "Hellos."

"How is Paris?"

"Fine." The awkward moment had passed. We examined each other's partner. She was prettier than I, I had to admit it. What went on in his head, I don't know. His face wouldn't give it away, but I bet he was proud to be in the company of such a pretty girl.

I felt compelled to stay with Tomas Munk for the remainder of the party and he was visibly pleased. We sensed a mutual attraction and parted with regret. Two years really is a short time, I consoled myself

and wondered how our next encounter might be. I had to leave the party in a rush since I had promised to meet my brother Milan, who was arriving by train from a business trip in Egypt.

ebruary 28, 1939

I don't dare contradict Milan. I am devoted to him, and have always accepted his guidance throughout the years. Orphaned so young, he thought he had to take care of his little sister, though often we didn't see eye to eye. He was strict and I rebelled against restrictions. Yet he is the most important person in my life. I had especially realized this during my absence from Brno.

Yesterday, we visited our cousin Jan, a successful financier, who would not hear of my plan to transfer money to France. "It is not safe, and besides, a fifteen percent loss is unacceptable," he said, pounding his desk. "The idea of selling a house is foolish. Houses don't lose their value." As if to confirm his wise opinion, he added, "Haven't you heard about Lord Runciman's visit? Chamberlain sent him here to help straighten things out. It will all be settled—and soon!"

Milan is a splendid chemist-pharmacist, but no financial or political expert. He is accepting Jan's opinion, partly, I think, because Jan is a man, and I'm only a woman. Besides, he is an established businessman. There is no way I can persuade them. My mission has failed. They are oblivious to the serious political situation and seem lulled into a false sense of security. Life for them is fine today, why shouldn't it go on? They refuse to see the writing on the wall.

March 1, 1939

My departure was painful. Although I am looking forward to seeing Paris again and picking up my life where I left it, my heart is heavy.

I refused to be accompanied by anyone, not wanting to see anybody's tears, but my vision was blurred as the train pulled out of the station.

During a stop-over in Vienna, I visited my cousins, Anna and David. It was a sad meeting. They live in constant fear of the Gestapo but are glad their only child, a five-year old boy, is safely in England with a children's transport. They have applied for United States visas and can only pray they will come in time. Every knock at the door terrifies them. I offered to smuggle some of their jewels into France. I stuffed diamond pins and rings into a tube of toothpaste, a watch and bracelets into stockings, and thought what a fool I had been to leave my own jewels at home.

As I crossed town to the West-Station I saw the dismaying changes that had taken place since my last stay in Vienna only a few months ago. Before the Anschluss, Vienna had been filled with foreign visitors, its lively coffeehouse terraces humming with cosmopolitan discourse. None of this is visible now. I had read many articles, some humorous, some sombre, in the Viennese and Prague newspapers, describing these changes. But to see it with my own eyes, and the many German uniforms, made me shudder.

"Good bye, Vienna," I thought sadly, as I gazed out the window of the Express carrying me back to Paris.

Paris, March 16, 1939

The blow has finally fallen. Yesterday the Czech President Hacha was ordered to Berlin where he signed the surrender of our country. German troops surged into Bohemia and Moravia, meeting no resistance, and Hitler made a triumphant entry into Prague.

"Czechoslovakia is erased from the map!" It was a boast like a knife thrust....

So now little Czechoslovakia, as a Protectorate, is at the mercy of the Third Reich. Germany has gained a cornucopia filled with war material, as well as the vast Škoda factories. And all of this taken away by the simple stroke of a pen! "Treachery, fraud, and blackmail " I sobbed to Pavel.

Chamberlain is said to have opined: "The prospects for peace are better than ever," while Sir Samuel Hoare even suggested the world was entering a "Golden Age."

I cringed when I read those headlines, and I heard on the radio that Hitler had slept in Prague's Hradschin Castle, the ancient seat of kings, where not so long ago, Presidents Thomas Masaryk and his follower, Eduard Beneš, had lived and worked for democracy. This is gone forever, I fear—all the sacrifices of the Czech people, all our efforts over the past twenty years to create a peaceful and healthy state—all in vain! My people had built sandcastles, swept away by the flood tide of Nazism.

March 18, 1939

Since my financial situation promises to get worse, I recently decided to learn hairdressing. Pavel finally found the address of a suitable school, and with some trepidation I registered. It is a large place on the second floor of a very old apartment house, near the Palais Royal, somewhat depressing. There are about fifty students and the clients are women who get their beauty treatments free, and come from all levels of society, but mostly from the lower working class. As guinea pigs they have to endure all kinds of beginners' clumsiness, sometimes with disastrous results.

At first, I was given strands of hair, toupees and wigs to practice

on. But when I began to work on the heads of live clients, I realized I was not cut out for that profession. The final straw was when I had to wash the hair of a woman whose head was so dirty that normal washing was useless. On the advice of the manager, I prepared an ammonia solution to use on the woman's head; when I returned I saw a speck crawling down her bib. A louse! I turned on my heels and quit on the spot. I am shaken by my awareness that life is crumbling about me at every level.

ril 1, 1939

I have spent the last several days with Pavel, walking from one consulate to another, countries I had scarcely heard of, and countries we previously had looked down upon. One country after another has closed its doors to immigrants. Nobody wants us, nobody has any use for us.

The other day Fred joined us as we were sitting on the terrace of the Café Royal. He held up his passport with a visa!

"Australia?" I exclaimed. "But that is so far!"

"Far from where?" Fred answered caustically.

Last week Veronika's parents sent her a train ticket to Norway, with orders to come home at once. At first she thought of refusing to leave, until Pavel urged her to go. Heartbroken, she left yesterday. Last night I heard Pavel crying in his room. What a special person he is!

ril 7, 1939

I am seeing more and more emigrés and refugees. Many of us have lost or forsaken everything they owned--some of it considerable. The situation has become precarious for many and intolerable for all of us. Daily we are joined by newcomers who have fled to save their lives, and the lucky ones who were able to leave with a regular or even forged visa

are far outnumbered by those who simply escaped. Many suffer from depression and it is not unusual to hear of suicides. The other day we heard of the suicide of a friend of mine from Brno. The daughter of one of the city's foremost gynecologists, she had thrown herself under an oncoming subway train. She had just started at the School of Medicine, when the German occupation took place. She was a beautiful girl whose fiancé was from the Sudeten, and following the invasion he had joined the Nazis. Her parents expected trouble, and sent her out of the country, promising to follow her as soon as they received exit permits. But she had learned they had been sent to a concentration camp. When we heard this news we all felt depressed, and more angry and hopeless than ever.

Pavel seems numb. It's almost as if he's living in another world. I know he's aware of all that's going on, because if I try to talk about it—or ask him what he's going to do—he simply changes the subject. Something is going on in his mind, but I don't know what it is. Again I made the round of the Consulates alone.

pril 8, 1939

I am now almost out of money, and a friend told me of a lady from Singapore who needed daily body massage. She was somewhat invalided and lived with her dog in a fashionable hotel near the Madeleine. I did not waste any time, made an appointment by phone and introduced myself the next morning. Mrs. Green is married to an American businessman who is often away. The dog, a German Schnauzer, barked viciously when I knocked at the door. When I was let in, he only sniffed at my skirt, seemed satisfied and returned to his pillow. The interview went smoothly and lasted only a few minutes. The question of salary did not cause any difficulty, since I asked only for the amount usually given the "au pair," that is, only pocket money. My first job!

April 12, 1939

Mrs. Green is a kind lady, quiet and lonely, and after massages she enjoys conversation with me. The dog seems to like me and we have become friends, but when waiters and other service personnel enter the apartment, he often attacks them. So they refuse to come in. Mrs. Green suggested I become a "governess" to the dog. Why not. I thought—I'll make more money—so I agreed. Prince behaves quite well and gives me no trouble. Of course, all he needed was a few walks and a change of scenery.

May 1, 1939

Mrs. Green, holding a cable in her hand, announced with a big smile that her husband was joining her this very day. When Mr. Green, an exuberant man, bursting with health, arrived, stepping out of his big American car, unloading his golf clubs, she suddenly was a changed woman, no longer needing massages.

May 15, 1939

The Greens spent the following days, late into the nights, away from the hotel. The demand for my "dog-sitting" and other chores became too much and on a sudden impulse—for I was feeling used and unimportant—I told them I would quit. They tried to dissuade me, wanting to take me to Vichy.

"You will travel with us by car," they thought to tempt me. I declined. Little did they know that travel by car is nothing new to me. So they had to let me go with regrets and good wishes. Somehow, I can't regret behaving in such a rash way.

May 18, 1939

I arrived home to find a most pleasant surprise. Cousin Lydia with her husband and mother have achieved a hair-raising escape from Prague. As an actress who had performed throughout Europe and in the United States, she possessed several visas, also a car—old but in good condition, and an international driver's license. Her husband, a business-man with expertise in a national industry, had taken refuge in the French Embassy to avoid forced collaboration with the Nazis, who would

extort secret manufacturing formulae then despatch the specialists to concentration camps. He had applied several times for an exit visa, but was always denied.

While taking a change of clothes to her husband, Lydia had received a telephone call at the Embassy from her mother. The Gestapo had been at their house inquiring about his whereabouts. She had put them off but knew they would return. Alarmed, Lydia told her mother to meet her right away downtown at the corner of the Charles Bridge, reported the conversation to her husband, and together they left the Embassy. When they arrived at the bridge her mother was waiting. They left Prague unprepared, without any luggage. When they were almost through Germany the lights of the car failed and they drove in darkness, undetected by police. By some miracle they crossed the Swiss border safely and had arrived in Paris completely exhausted, yet bubbling with excitement, crying and laughing at the same time, and filling quieter intervals with kisses and hugs. Pavel seemed happier than he had been for days.

There was no end to the questioning and talking until almost morning. Everyone's adrenalin was pumped up and nobody in the house could sleep. There are too many of us in the apartment now, and I am the logical one to go.

I must find a job. I have again visited several consulates, applying for visas, but am always rejected. The simple truth is that nobody wants more immigrants.

Michelle has finally received the <u>coup de grâce</u> from Franz Schindler. He had sent her a few letters from Uruguay, progressively briefer and farther apart, so I was hoping the affair would just quietly fade away.

—and I can't help feeling distressed for Michelle—
But yesterday/she showed up at our apartment sorrow-stricken, and handed me his latest, no doubt his last, letter. He would never, he said, be permitted to practice there as a physician, and had been forced to find another living. In Montevideo he had met a well-established German business man, who had offered him a partnership.

"By the way," he had ended his letter, "he has a very nice daughter, with whom I get along very well, and we plan to be married next month. I hope all goes well with you, my dear, and that you will find the happiness you deserve. Fondly, Franz."

Déjà vu!

May 24, 1939

Milan telephoned this morning. Oh, it was so comforting hearing his voice, and so worried about his "little sister." Of course, he didn't mention the take-over, just personal thoughts. Was I well? Did I have enough to eat? When would I come home? Good old Milan, always trying to protect me! "But Milan, you forget, I am grown up now, I know what I'm doing and besides, being Jewish, I feel safer here. I love you, dear, and do try to get out! I'll write soon.. Love to all!"

The coffee house was emptier than usual this morning, so rather than sit alone on the terrace I chose a corner table indoors, and prepared to study want ads. I had hardly opened the paper when a booming voice resounded from the doorway.

"Zdenka! Why are you hiding? I've been looking all over for you."

"Franta! Why are you hunting," I laughed, pleased at his boisterous attention. "Do you by chance have a visa for me?"

"No, but I do have something I think might interest you. How would you like to go to Saint Jean de Luz?"

"Where—or what—is Saint Jean de Luz?"

"It's a resort town in the Southwest of France, near Biarritz, in Basque country. But there's one snag—you would have to leave the day after tomorrow."

"That's fine with me, but I haven't a penny to my name."

"That's no obstacle either."

"Would you kindly tell me what I am supposed to do in your St. Jean de Luz?"

"Of course. Here is the address and phone number of a good friend of mine. She has two young daughters, and is going to St. Jean with the idea of staying for the summer. She needs somebody to accompany her and help with the children. Call her right away. By the way, she is Czechoslovakian. You two have a similar background, so you should get on. Her name is Renata Petschek. Her husband was a banker in Bratislava, has transferred to Paris, and has good connections in New York. So, that's all you need to know, I think. Good luck."

I thanked Franta and, when we parted I promised I'd send him a postcard from the sunny Basque country.

Mrs. Petschek, on the phone, sounded very nice. She has a deep, warm voice and seemed pleased to hear from me. Franta must have told her something about me, which made it easier for both of us to talk freely without any awkward gropings or hesitations.

"Could you come to my house right away? It would be good if we could speak and make all arrangements quickly."

Mrs. Petschek herself greeted me at the door. She is a tall woman,

very slim, blonde, in her late twenties, I would guess, gracious and vivacious. She led me into an elegantly furnished living room, and we sat down by a small table where tea was waiting. She indicated a silver cigarette box, inviting me to help myself. She radiated a sense of well-being. Her manner was crisp but not curt, her movements quick and expressive but not nervous.

"No, thanks," I said. "Not right now."

She lighted a cigarette, and studied me briefly through a thin veil of smoke. I thought I detected a hint of amusement in her eyes.

"Do you not have any vices?"

"Oh yes, lots of vices," I replied, "but I usually manage to make virtues of them."

She laughed appreciatively, seeming to say we would get along famously. I felt completely relaxed and comfortable with her.

Two little girls—twins as I learned—burst joyously into the room, one shouting, "Mommy! Mommy! Alex took us to a park, and we saw a clown with a monkey!"

"My, how exciting. Where's Alex now? Did he go on?"

"He had to go. Some place--I don't know."

"Well, never mind. It's just as well." Mrs. Petschek smiled enigmatically.

After the introductions—I was "Your Auntie Zdenka"—things quietened down while the girls sized me up, just as their mother had done. Daisy, the one who had shouted, stared at me boldly, but Vera, obviously shy, played a kind of peek-a-boo, alternately shading her eyes with her hands and covering them up entirely.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Three," Daisy answered, holding up three fingers.

Ignoring the children, Mrs. Petschek outlined her plans. Her husband is staying in Paris to attend to business, so there will be just the four of us. The main duty will be to help with the children, but there will be no (as she put it) "real work," since we shall be in a hotel apartment, with maid service. She will not be able to pay me a salary, of course, because of the work rules, but will give me the usual pocket money. Since she likes to go out in the evenings, and would occasionally want me to accompany her, she suggested I bring along some evening dresses. She set the time for me to meet her at the Gare de l'Oest, then rose from her seat, saying, "Well, that's that."

At the door she said lightly: "You may call me Rena, and you shall be Zdenka to me."

So now, I must set about packing, and saying goodbye to my friends, for we are leaving day after tomorrow. I feel extraordinarily lighthearted, and for the first time in months I dare to hope that my luck may be turning. I just had to write this all down, first.

Good bye, Paris—for a little while! How difficult to say goodbye to places!

CHAPTER THREE

Saint Jean de Luz

June 7, 1939

We have been here two weeks and I've managed to spend most of my time on the beach, just two blocks from our hotel. I share one room with the girls, and supervise them with their meals, their baths, etc.

I have become good friends with Rena. She is easy to get along with, always cheerful and ready for fun. We spend most of the day by the sea where we have rented a tent with a few chairs. The children play in the fine sand and enjoy paddling in the shallow water. Rena and I can swim way offshore knowing the children are in no danger. Slowly vacationers start to fill the hotels and life becomes quite agitated. From day to day, more tents are being stacked up on the beach and we get to know the neighbors. The children made friends with other children of their age and already squabble with them in French. Along the beach there is the "promenade" flanked with tamarisk trees and benches. The first row of houses along the promenade consists mainly of bars, cafés and villas surrounded by colorful gardens. Outside the bars people sip their aperitifs and nibble olives and chips while watching activity on the beach.

June 15, 1939

St. Jean de Luz has become a bustling town and Rena's appetite for entertainment is insatiable. She wants to enjoy life without restraint, and I have to accompany her on these escapades. Neighboring Biarritz is a more fashionable luxury resort—a playground for international film

stars, playboys, and the rich. Politicians, even heads of State, vacation there. Even so, St. Jean de Luz also has its attractions on a smaller scale.

The nightclubs, bars, and cafés are always crowded. Bands play the latest hits—what else?—at the Casino "La Pergola" and in all the major hotels, as people relentlessly do the Lambeth Walk or indefatigably dance tangos and foxtrots. Everybody wants to enjoy life to the fullest before disaster strikes.

And yet, do people really sense a world tension, or do I only imagine it? If they are worried, they certainly do not show it. But who am I to judge? For I too am caught up in the swirl of entertainment. It has not taken me long to learn why Rena was so eager to have me accompany her on her evening outings. She is on the prowl, and with an amoralist's sense of propriety feels it "looks better" for two women to appear together at the bars and cafés and dance halls. And she can always use me as an excuse to leave if an encounter turns sour. I do not pass judgment on her so-called morality. To me, morality has to do with how one treats other people—with cruelty or compassion, meanly or generously, deceitfully or honestly. And Rena is compassionate, generous, and open. I like her.

A week ago we met Johnny and Derek, two young teachers from Blackpool, England, and soon became friends. Derek flirts with Rena and Johnny visibly took a liking to me. He is the first foreigner with whom I have come in close contact. I wonder whether that's what makes him more attractive or simply because he is a real charmer. Contrary to what I thought of Englishmen, he is outgoing and has a sunny disposition.

On the beach we all sit together, swim far out in the ocean and bask together in the summer sun. I dance half the night away with Johnny. Last night, when most of the hotel guests had gone to their rooms, we were in high spirits and improvised a bull fight. Johnny and Derek were the bulls, Rena and I the matadors attacking them with turned stools. The whole game ended with everyone rolling on the floor, shaking with laughter.

One day I went with Johnny to a real bullfight in Bayonne. I was curious but on the other hand didn't look forward to witnessing a cruel and bloody performance, but Johnny is an ardent admirer of Hemingway and would not miss the opportunity to judge for himself the excitement of the bullring. The spectacle was overwhelming and I hardly had eyes for the actual bullfight. I mainly watched the people, women in typical Spanish costumes, mantillas and ornate combs on the heads, vivaciously yet gracefully waving their fans with one hand, while holding colorful parasols in the other. The entrance into the arena of the protagonists was certainly spectacular and Johnny explained the various phases of the ritual but it did not interest me; instead it was the excited public that fascinated me.

"It seems a good bullfight is lost on you," Johnny said disappointedly.

"My gentle soul is not prepared for this type of games," I answered flippantly, not wanting to spoil his pleasure.

How strange that an Englishman—I had always considered them cool and emotionless—should be attracted to such a sport, certainly not the typical English "gentleman's game." We walked back to the bus, holding hands.

On the crowded bus home, I felt his warmth and his desire to hold me close. I certainly feel attracted to him, I like his company and I also know that I am very fond of him. But more than that, NO! The scar from Max's rejection which had wounded me so deeply, is stil warning me. I will not allow the fondness I feel for Johnny to grow into a deeper affection or even love. Perhaps, if we had more time— more peace of mind. Perhaps .... I sometimes wonder if I will ever again be able to love a man. Don't they say that time heals all the wounds?

From the bus station we walked in semidarkness and Johnny suddenly took me into his arms and kissed me passionately. I know he has fallen in love with me and I am frightened. I do not know how to handle the situation. Good God, it doesn't make sense. I am not ready for love! I certainly want to consider Johnny's sensitivity. He is a young man, emotionally immature and vulnerable. I don't want him to get hurt the way I was hurt by Max. And because I am fond of him I wish to protect him.

But what can I do about it, I asked. "Nothing" seemed the only logical answer, and just enjoy the presence and forget about the future. Let destiny, with its irresponsible quirks, decide. What other solution is there?

uly 15, 1939

We were able to witness and take part in the glorious "Independence Day" celebration. The streets and houses were lavishly decorated and festooned, and spirits were high. There was singing, drinking and embracing in the bars and cafés, and out in the streets. At sundown, the procession arrived, led by a fire-spitting monster, followed by people,

young and old, in colorful costumes, jumping up and down, stromping and swaying. Crackling fireworks illuminated the sky, exploding, bathing the whole town in brilliant light and coming down with deafening noise. The whole population seemed to be on its feet. We too, joined the crowd, caught up in the contagious merriment.

Handfuls of confetti were hurled at girls by young men using an old trick. They gently tapped the girls' shoulders and when they turned their heads, the confetti covered their eyes and filled their open mouths. They, in turn, answered with paper streamers—it became an innocent, yet exciting game between the sexes. Cries and laughter filled the air. Dancing lasted till dawn, when street sweepers arrived with long brooms and voluminous buckets to remove the ankle-deep confetti.

Where will everybody be next Independence Day? Will there be an Independence Day at all?

August 15, 1939

How time is flying! The days melt one into the other. Summer will soon be over. Everyone immerses himself into all kind of pleasures as if believing there is no tomorrow.

August 20, 1939

War lurks around the corner. Johnny believes Britain and France will stand by Poland if it is attacked by the Germans.

"The British will cross the Channel to Belgium within thirty days of mobilization, and I will be one of them" he said sternly. "My batallion will be called for duty immediately."

I shuddered.

ugust 23, 1939

Europe is in uproar. Russia has signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler at the expense of Poland, the traditional buffer of the West. We all are holding our breath. Is this just another bitter fruit of Chamberlain's foolish visit to Berchtesgaden? Was Stalin too fearful the Russians would be left alone to bear the brunt of Hitler's insane designs? I cannot follow the devious quirks of these men who have such control over our fate. This frightens me as much as anything.

eptember 1, 1939

ARMAGEDDON! It has come, the blow has fallen. The Germans have invaded Poland. There is no doubt that Britain and France will respond with a declaration of war.

eptember 3, 1939

Britain has declared war on Germany, with France following six hours later. All Europe trembles now. No one knows where it will lead. At least we—the Czechs and Austrians—are no longer alone. Prime Minister Chamberlain came on the air, disclosing the fact that war has begun. Does he feel any guilt over what his policy of appeasement had brought on the world, I wonder.

eptember 8, 1939

"Wait for me—do promise me!" Johnny had pleaded for my response with his eyes.

"Johnny, take care," I said. Feeling like a mother must feel when her son departs for war, I whispered, "I love you." He let out a deep sigh and gave me one long, last kiss. It was not a kiss a son gives to

his mother.

Was it the cloud of dust or my tears that caused the car's disappearance behind a veil?

September 10, 1939

St. Jean ist almost deserted. Only the locals, a few rich Spaniards who had fled the civil war, and a handful of Jewish refugees remain.

Mr. Petschek called immediately after the news broke, asking Rena to stay with the children in St. Jean. He feels we would be safer here than in Paris, which, he fears, will soon be bombed. He wants Rena to find an apartment for the whole family, and will be joining us shortly. Rena asked if I would like to stay with them under these circumstances, and help with the household. I accepted with joy. What other choice do I have anyway?

Received a letter from Pavel who has been called up by the Czech Army in Exile. Since he went through military training at home before leaving for Paris, he is ready to fight. In a sad way it also solves the seemingly hopeless plight of Pavel and others like him in trying to find visas to emigrate to another country. Most of them are joining remnants of the once-proud Czech Army at Agde, in the south of France.

On his way to Agde, Pavel will stop in St. Jean. He is anxious to see me and at the same time meet Rena and the children. I have booked him into a small, inexpensive hotel, just around the corner from us and I feel Pavel will be comfortable there.

"It might be the last decent living quarters I'll occupy for a long time," he said.

September 13, 1939

Pavel looked pale on his arrival, so we have spent the greater part of his stay at the beaches. Rena and the children usually come along. We three adults spent one day and night in Biarritz—as Rena's guests. We never got to bed at all, as Pavel and Rena almost danced the night away, and after a huge breakfast we came back to St. Jean early in the morning.

eptember 19, 1939

Russian soldiers have crossed Poland's eastern frontier and the garrison at Warsaw is holding out valiantly against hopeless odds. Why did Russia have to get into it! I have feared something like this since Russia and Germany signed their non-aggression pact. All of Europe seems to be gripped by madness. Where—and how—will it all end?

Pavel is enchanted with St. Jean. He feels it is a little paradise.

"...What have we done to deserve being here" he asked, "while so many people we know are suffering."

"You have no idea how I feel the same way," I agreed.

eptember 21, 1939

Pavel has become involved in a not-so-secret little affair with Rena. It is not really a love affair—neither of them is looking for a lasting commitment—but rather a "we-like-each-other-so-let's-have-some-fun kind of affair. I try to be discreet and act as though I knew nothing, although she never makes secrets of her affairs. I am sure Rena is the

best medicine right now. The outlook Pavel has on what to expect in the coming months—perhaps even years—is heavy on his mind. A little love that does not go too deep should be a welcome distraction.

It is surprising how many refugees we meet on the beach or in the cafés. They come from all corners of Europe and have the same goal in mind: emigration. Our conversation turns mostly around the losses in their homelands, visas and affidavits.

Only Mr. Robitschek is different and refreshing. A jovial, middle-aged Czech from Prague, he amuses us with his optimism and sense of humor.

"What are you planning to do?" we ask him.

"Oh, something will show up. If nothing else, it will be the 'haricots verts'". We looked at him, not understanding what he meant.

"Don't you know, that's what the German soldiers are called, because of their green uniforms. But there will always be time to find a way out. I have nothing much to lose anymore. My feet are flat, that's why the military don't want me, and, to be frank, I don't want them either. If push comes to shove, I'll take Lohengrin's swan and let him carry me away over the ocean into the unknown." He admitted, though, that he had left in Czechoslovakia a good portion of his money and an export business but had secretly transferred most of his fortune to New York.

The days went by much too fast. We were happy together though we knew the end was near. We loved to evoke bitter-sweet memories and talk with nostalgia about home, our relatives and friends.

Finally Pavel's stay came to an end.

"Take care of Zdenka," were his last words to Rena.

Pavel's departure has left behind a dreary emptiness. We seem to be born into an age of continuous farewells!

October 1, 1939

Mr. Petschek arrived today, took a good look at the little town of St. Jean, decided he could not live in such a provincial village, and took off again for Paris. Rena opined, sarcastically, that it was not so much small-town living that bothered him as having to leave his Parisian mistress.

Rena, feeling restless, has decided she needs a change, and will spend three weeks in Paris. St. Jean seems to have become too quiet for her, too. The children are in kindergarten during the day, and I'm able to take care of the rest.

The apartment is not big but comfortable and easy to keep clean. Suddenly I have become a housewife and mother for children that are not mine. They are bad eaters and I had to learn how to prepare healthy meals which would be acceptable to them. The starting of a fire in the kitchen in order to cook and simultaneously heat the apartment is my main challenge. Never before have I started a fire or chopped kindling. Hardly a day passes without my cutting or burning one of my fingers.

The other day I took a walk along the bay, all the way from Soccoa, an old fort that now serves as lighthouse, to the hills of St. Barbe on the opposite side. It is quite a trek and I rested a while under a tamarisk tree, watching the fishermen unloading their fresh catch, from their colorful boats.

Once in a while I meet some of the refugee friends for coffee. It is a pleasant interruption to an otherwise monotonous life. I don't hear from Pavel or the rest of my Czech friends who are busy with their military training and trying to adapt to an unfamiliar style of life. The friends in Paris have mostly dispersed and belong to the past.

Coming home from a walk, I found a letter from Milan. It was heavily censored but he describes between the lines the sad situation in Brno and Prague. Most of my belongings were confiscated, the grand piano, antiques and priceless paintings are gone, and the house taken over by the Germans. Everybody is still hoping to get out. Milan has been forced out of the house and lives with Grandmother and Auntie Mathilda. He now works as a factory laborer. What a sad letter! If only he had got out when it was possible.

October 5, 1939

This afternoon, upon their return from kinderkarten, the children brought me a message from Castillo Mora to hurry over to the Café Vauban to meet a Spanish friend of his. Castillo is an amiable and jovial old man who spends most of his time at the café entertaining Spanish refugees with his tales of a Spain of long ago—long before Franco. I met him on the beach one day, we took a liking to each other, and since then we frequently exchange stories of Spain and Czechoslovakia. His message sounded urgent so I hurried over.

Castillo rose from his seat and beckoned me over. Xavier, a young Argentinian whom I already knew and couldn't stand, sat next to him. As far as I know Xavier is very rich and on the basis of his wealth tries to attract pretty girls. He tried to seduce me too—that stinker! His

cheesy complexion contrasts so much with the tanned faces of the rest of the vacationers and his risqué and suggestive talk I find repulsive. Two other Spaniards sat at the table. Castillo introduced Antonio Vergara and Miguel Echegarrai, both from Bilbao, awaiting the normalization of conditions in Spain. Antonio's attention was captured by a woman at the next table with whom he conversed in Spanish, while Miguel ordered me a cup of coffee and offered me a cigarette. He seems a quiet man, possibly attributable to his lack of French. Unusually tall for a Spaniard, broad-shouldered with dark brown hair and matching eyes, he has a pleasant, disarming smile. We all tried to converse in French, which led to considerable confusion.

Soon I had to leave and Miguel asked to accompany me home. On the way he explained his presence in St. Jean.

"My father had sent me before the Civil War to the United States and Canada to learn about international commerce. I am the oldest son and supposed to take over our family business. But when the fighting in my country started, I received orders from him not to return before the end of hostilities. When my permit was up I came here to be near my country. Also, re-entry from here into Spain takes only a couple of hours."

At the door, Miguel asked in his halting French whether I would like sometime to go to Bayonne with him in his car. My first impulse was to decline. But then, I had long waited to go to the Uruguayan Consulate and this seemed to be a good opportunity to try my luck again.

I explained my duty to the children.

"Why not bring them along? While you're at the Consulate I'll take them to the famous ice-cream parlor under the arcades. It will be a pleasure," he said, bowing his head formally. "Why not tomorrow?"

And so it was agreed. He reached for my hand, and pressed it to his lips. "For now, good bye."

Had it been an accidental meeting, or somewhat premeditated? If it had been planned, it surprised me. I don't consider myself so attractive that anybody would go to any trouble to meet me. But be that as it may, he seems kind and sincere. I like his frequent warm smile, at times overshadowed by a melancholic expression in his eyes. I wonder how a friendship can work out, given our shaky and minimal knowledge of French. After all, communication is the basis of a good relationship!

October 6, 1939

The children were ready early, excited by the prospect of a trip out of St. Jean. It was a beautiful, warm fall day. A horn sounded and the children charged down the stairs and piled into Miguel's Citroen, in eager expectation of Bayonne's city life, but mainly looking forward to the famous ice cream everybody was raving about. Miguel right away won their confidence as a new uncle. After the short drive, I left them in a café patisserie and went to the consulate to enquire about a visa. The consul employee gave me little hope and again I left down-hearted. I couldn't hide my disappointment when rejoining Miguel and the children.

"I'll take you back on a beautiful coastal road," he announced and swerved into a side road. Palm, lemon and orange trees flanked the winding road above the glittering azure sea. The sweet aroma of late-blooming flowers filled the autumn air. We stopped at a deserted beach, left the car in the shade of some pine trees, took our shoes off and walked towards the water. The children paddled in the gentle waves and built sandcastles. At first, we sat in silence gazing out over the ocean.

Seagulls that had waded on the shore lifted their wings and fluttered noiselessly into the air. Their slow choreography, the silent grace of their passage, interrupted my gaze. Suddenly, Miguel grasped my hand and said haltingly:

"For so long I had wished to meet you. For months I have observed you. I never had the courage to talk to you. I have seen you with the children on the beach. And finally we met! I almost had given up hope to make your acquaintance when Castillo mentioned that he knew you. You cannot imagine how happy I was when he promised to introduce us at the best opportunity."

I hardly knew what to say. Never before has a man so frankly proclaimed that he has been anxious to meet me. He made it sound almost like a declaration of love. I really must learn more about this man.

October 15, 1939

Miguel keeps intruding on my thoughts. The other day he talked about the upringing of children in his country. His bourgeois and Catholic indoctrination has prepared him for the double standard.

"One marries a girl who has been checked over and approved, and sometimes even chosen by the family members, out of the inner social circle," he addmitted scornfully.

"The rules are strict with little attention given to the feelings of the young man. Soon after having contracted the marriage he has to start a big family—the sooner and the bigger the better. While this is the established rule, it does not eliminate the possibility of relationships with other women—before and after marriage. Nobody frowns at affairs outside marriage as long as they don't interfere with the appearance

of good family life. Affairs are therefore easily initiated without regard for consequences. Silent acceptance protects the man and it never comes to his mind that this double standard is not right and could be harmful. It is their way of life even though it might destroy a girl."

"But this is wrong, Miguel," I finally interrupted.

"Of course, it is wrong, especially when I think of my little sister."

"Then don't you have any guilt feelings? Ideologies like these illuminate the striking difference of mores between your country and Western Europe," I said emphatically.

"Yes, of course you are right," he nodded. "And as for a guilty feeling I haven't given it too much thought, I must admit. If there existed a 'collective guilt,' it might be possible to change but there is none. Besides, it has been this way for centuries and a change takes a long time. Perhaps this war will bring about shifts in attitudes, thinking and mores."

Miguel paused and after a while added: "Wars usually produce enormous changes in one's life, don't they?"

Good Gracious, what kind of strange customs and different morals are these, I thought. His comments affected me. I felt my different background and modern upbringing were worlds apart from his. I wonder whether he too follows this indoctrination. Should I expect some future possible problems because of this difference? My own vulnerability might be at stake. Suddenly he expressed an afterthought.

"Society has this schizophrenic division, with men taking care of business, destruction and war ...."

"... and women in charge of cleaning up the mess," I quickly broke in.

October 17, 1939

Rena is back from Paris for a few days, so I am temporarily relieved of responsibility for the children. Yesterday Miguel called and invited me for a ride. Today we went on a curving roller-coaster road that followed the coast and stopped at a lovely spot near Biarritz, 'La Negresse,' a wooded area next to the beach, where swaying pine trees reach almost the shore. "L'Auberge," at an earlier time a stable, had been converted to an elegant country-club-style inn. The bar was furnished in typical English-club style with comfortable arm chairs, fireplace, and hunting scenes on the walls. Outside, on a wide terrace, surrounded by well-tended lawns, were white-painted garden chairs, covered with bright colored, soft cushions and shadowed by gay umbrellas. A few guests sat around, mainly Spaniards, having their customary aperitifs. Miguel pointed out that they were aristocrats who had fled the civil war and were waiting in relative safety to return as soon as peace and security is established in their country. Our conversation is still difficult but we have come to know each other better and the mutual attraction has helped overcome the original strangeness. The language barrier no longer inhibits us. Miguel is not a flirt in the common sense but he visibly adores me and tries to fulfill my every wish. His courtship is subtle, and his charm irresistible.

The other day, he invited me to the villa which he rents from a French couple that lives in Toulouse. It is a small, charming cottage in the back of a well-kept flower garden. The windows are screened with heavy, ornate iron grills and surrounded by rambling roses. Inside, the warmth of every piece of furniture and ornamental accessories reflect good taste and make one feel at home. Here, in the spacious living-room, I discovered Miguel's artistic inclinations. I was surprised to find out about his

fine talent to draw. In his many hours of leisure he releases his tensions with drawings, mostly water-color pictures. Many of these are seascapes, ships surrounded by high and turbulent waves. Right away one has the feeling these ships are in distress and doomed to sink. It is these paintings which made me understand more than anything Miguel's soft character which seems to be perturbed. I wonder whether it is mainly the reflection of the situation in his country that weighs so much on his emotional frame of mind.

At first I thought he was aloof, showing very few emotions. He is even-tempered and does not at all possess the characteristics of a "temperamental Spaniard." When I pointed this out to him, he laughingly corrected me, "I am not a Spaniard, I am a Basque." In spite of his outward tranquility which almost borders on apathy his mind seems at times to be tortured and his sadness often is depressive.

He likes to speak with pride about his country.

"I am deeply committed to my parentage. Do you know, we have preserved our own identity despite powerful foreign influences throughout the past, Celts, Romans, Vikings and Moors have all left legacies. Even the armies of Charlemagne and Napoleon passed through. We are the descendants of an ancient race and have inhabited the Pyrenees for centuries." I do like his mini-lectures!

October 21, 1939

The short trips we make to the beautiful Basque countryside often bring us on hills where we can see neighboring Spain. One day, sitting on a grassy knoll, we had before our eyes a sweep of green and golden meadows. I was leaning my head against Miguel's shoulders, and looked

up, watching the expression on his face. This was the first time I had seen him tense. He sat there with closed eyes.

"Would you rather have returned to Spain when you left the United States instead of coming here?" I asked.

"I really don't know," he replied reluctantly. "I have conflicting feelings about it. My political conviction was not delineated in precise directions. And our war was not black or white, or like this war, bad or good. I think that's why my feelings were ambivalent. And to that came the fact of my brother's fighting on the other side."

"You are right, a civil war is quite different from a war between attackers and defenders between two nations. I must admit, I'm not very knowledgeable about your civil war. We sat snug and safe in our little country and were interested only in our unimportant problems. Spain was so far away. How did the whole thing start?"

"It was in March 1936, when the insurrection of General Franco against the Loyalists, who were the legitimate government of the Spanish Republic, began and quickly acquired the full support of German and Italian armies and air forces, who used the occasion to practice their techniques of warfare against Spanish towns and Spanish people. Though our ministers appealed for French intervention, the Front Populaire, under intense pressure from Britain, remained neutral and inactive. They only participated in organizations of facilities for refugees. Soon the uprising degenerated into full-scale battles."

"I have to admit, I never before had thought about the terrible consequences of civil war or implications of fights for political affiliations. The nearest I came to political conflict was when I was a student and member of a social-democratic club. I refused on May 1st to carry the

big banner in front of the marching group. I was thrown out of the party shortly after and I still remember the embarrassement I felt."

Miguel remained silent.

I wished to know what he was thinking but knew intuitively that he needed comforting and started to stroke his hair. I don't know how long we sat there. Suddenly his tension broke down and he pulled me toward him and kissed me tenderly, first on my eyes and then on my mouth. It was a long passionate kiss. At first I was surprised and startled. I had felt, of course, that he was fond of me, but so far, he had never shown it. This was the first outward sign of his feelings, a sign that I meant to him more than a pleasant pastime. There was more passion in his embrace than I ever had felt in a man.

"Let's go home," he said, and rising to his feet pulled me up with him. Silently we walked back to the car.

After a short drive, we arrived at his home. Gray dusk had replaced the last warming rays of the sun, enveloping them in light shadows. I could clearly hear the chirping of crickets. I started to shiver when the coolness of the night touched my body. I broke away from Miguel and wanted to walk away. He quickly was behind me and drew me back.

"Don't leave me now, please come in."

I hesitated for a moment, but the tone of his voice and the look of his eyes made me vaccilate. I followed him through the garden toward the house, the sweet smell of the last roses and wood anemones mingling with the heavy aroma of the night-blooming jasmin and filling the air with its perfume. It couldn't have been more romantic. Even nature was on his side. We entered the dark cottage and soon flames were crackling in the fireplace. When the fire was well established, Miguel went into the

kitchen, raided the refrigerator and brought back all kinds of delicacies.

"I even found an old bottle of "Chateau Neuf du Pape," he said with a smile and triumphantly showed me a dust-covered wine bottle.

He filled two wine glasses and placed them on a low table near the fireplace and set the tray of food down next to them.

"To our love," he said, raising the glass. The sparkle in his words surprised me.

"To our love," I repeated.

The wine was smooth and rich and felt like liquid gold running down my throat, distributing welcome warmth in my body. I felt relaxed, sentimental and happy. I suddenly realized that all this time I had seen it coming but instinctly had fought against it. Now nothing seemed real anymore, and I knew I wouldn't be able to resist any longer. I was attracted to him so strongly that all the hardship, frustrations and heartbreaks of recent events faded into the background. I didn't know whether I was inebriated by the wine or by happiness. I did not care. I forgot everything. Our embrace and lovemaking was the most beautiful passion I had ever experienced.

We were lying in front of the fireplace. I tried to break away from his embrace.

"Stay with me," he whispered into my ear.

"No, I have to go back home," I said, slowly recovering my senses. "You know how curious and blunt Rena can be and she will ask me a thousand questions I don't want to answer."

Miguel reluctantly rose and prepared to take me home.

"No, please, I want to be by myself. I have a lot of thinking to do."

I walked unhurriedly along the beach. I felt the salty air from the bay touching my cheeks.

Oh God, what has happened—what did I do? How frightening! I fell in love against my better judgment! I sat down on a nearby bench to collect my confusing thoughts.

The shriek of a train whistle in the distance brought me back to reality and I began to walk home. The street was deserted and the muffled echo of my steps made me realize how late it was. It was dark in the house and everything was quiet. The silence was comforting. For a long time I lay awake. I did not even try to fall asleep, I knew I would not. The sweetness of Miguel's embrace still ran through my body and I wanted to keep it as long as possible. The warmth which enveloped me made me quiver. Slowly tiredness made me drowsy and finally I fell asleep.

October 22, 1939

This morning, at breakfast, Rena could not resist her curiosity and wanted to know everything.

"Yes, we made love, but please don't ask me details. Yes, I love him but I don't want to talk about it. This is my private affair and I have to work it out with myself."

"What about Johnny—he was so much in love with you."

"Yes, I know, and I am thinking of him and I am confused."

Rena realized that she'd better not joke about this turn of events as she often had in the past when my suitors tried to tempt me into an intimate relationship.

"Well, let me at least say this: I am glad to have found out you are a woman and not made out of stone. It was time you two found each

other. Having observed you and Johnny, I could not understand your relationship and I felt sorry for him. It was probably good that it ended as it did, without further sentimental involvement on your part."

October 26, 1939

Yesterday was my free day. We were lying in a secluded cove, bathing in the warm sun. The pine forest, stretching out on both sides of us, fell away into beautiful white dunes, the kind on which Bedouins might appear on galloping camels. Above us was the wide, blue sky, brilliant and transparent, and the fragrant ocean air filled our lungs. I was relaxed and fully enjoying our togetherness. Cradling my head on both arms which were half-buried in the warm sand, I watched a solitary gull assume its perch after feasting on a dinner caught in the rolling waves. The stillness was broken only by the pounding of the surf against the sandy beach. My acute awareness of Miguel being next to me filled me with happiness. It was this idyllic simplicity which affected me. Suddenly I caught Miguel's gaze, chuckling under his breath. Half jokingly I murmured, "A penny for your thoughts." He pulled me toward him.

"Do I have to let you know all my secret thoughts?" And kissing me passionately on my lips, shoulder and breasts, he whispered into my ears,

"Do I really have to tell you—don't you sense what I am thinking about?"

Our lovemaking was long and passionate.

"Let's go for a swim," I invited him into the water. The water was cool and tickled our skin. After a long swim, we gingerly rubbed our bodies, and stretched out again, elated and refreshed.

"Are you happy?" I asked him looking straight into his eyes.

"Now, isn't that a silly question? Don't you know by now how very precious you are to me? Do you feel we have to do some accounting to each other?" he added with a slightly hurt tone that made me believe he was somewhat offended.

"Of course not," I said quickly. Silence followed. Suddenly Miguel spoke again.

"One does question one's values and one tries to analyze them but where does one arrive at? We are born in the wrong century and should consider ourselves the victims of our times, and resign. Don't let's think what might happen and what will be—we certainly can't change it. That's why my future plans are vague. I know I'll have to return one day to my country and pick up life where I left off. My political ideas are different from the ones which dominate my country at present. But I won't fight against them. I am a conformist and, I suppose, in a wider sense, a darn opportunist. I could not run away and join some group of Reds and fight a lost cause. I never cared much for politics. I grew up in a so-called bourgeois-upper class media and can't shake it off because I don't like Franco and his military regime. I do not believe in suppressing an underprivileged class either—and they abound in my country—but I am brought up to make use of my mental faculties to expand a business, and thrive for success. Is that wrong?" He looked at me as if expecting an answer, but went on in rapid sequence.

"My younger brother was on the side of Franco right from the beginning and I was a Loyalist. Should I have fought against him? I was glad to be away from home at the outbreak of the war. I thus avoided a horrible dilemma. America has given me a broader perspective and I am glad I had the opportunity to see how a true democracy works. But I am convinced it

never will work in my country. We are basically a very independent people, individuals who never are happy with the regime of the moment. And this is our greatest defect." Here I interrupted him.

"I wish I knew more about Spain," I said. "In our history books at school we learned a lot about France and England, yet very little about Spain."

"I know. It is a curse that Europe ends at the Pyrenees. That's why we are a hundred years behind the rest of Europe in our development."

Here he changed again. "But what started this silly conversation! For heavens' sake, let's get out of here!" and pulling me up, he collected our belongings.

November 15, 1939

We are seeing each other almost every day. Miguel finds all kind of excuses to see me. He comes to our apartment, brings toys to the children, sometimes surprises me with fresh oysters knowing how Rena and I like them.

In order to make it easier for me to be with him, he even invites us both out for dinner. Although I am not jealous I do not like it. I do not consider myself a possessive person—at least I never felt I was one, but I want to be with Miguel as much as possible and I don't wish to share him with anyone else. Every minute I can be with him is dear to me. My time with him is so limited. I know he will return to Spain as soon as complete order is reestablished.

December 1, 1939

Rena left for Paris and I have more peace of mind. Although I have more responsibilities with the children and less freedom, I enjoy more

intimate hours with Miguel. The children adore "Uncle Miguel" and accept without questioning his frequent presence, and Miguel good humorously tolerates their games and fights, noisy at times.

In one of his exuberant moods, Miguel took me to the Grand Casino in Biarritz, an impressive building near the main beach, surrounded by flowers blooming in brilliant profusion—no matter what the season. The inside is impressive. I had not expected such luxury and in comparison with the one in St. Jean it seemed palatial. At a discreetly located table I had to show my identification paper as proof of being eighteen years old. Then I was free to move around.

I was awe struck. The place glittered. There are countless crystal chandeliers hanging from the high ceiling with dozens of little lights, reflected by floor-to-ceiling mirrors. My feet sank deep into the red carpets which muffled the steps to soundlessness. The red drapes framing the huge windows match the color of the carpets and in some rooms colorful Persian rugs cover the wall-to-wall carpets. Potted palms stand around in tasteful arrangements.

Miguel went into one of the baccarat salons where people sat in silence around a card table, not before filling my hands with colorful chips.

"Try your luck," he grinned. "Should you become a rich woman don't leave the building without me!"

It was a strange feeling to hold the chips in my hands. One forgets they represent money. I walked around for some time and looked at the many roulette and black jack tables that filled the rooms. It was quiet there and the silence astonished me. I watched with fascination the roulette spin and observed the players who stoically grabbed the winnings or hardly

watched the croupiers raking in the lost chips. When I finally picked up my courage, I placed them at random on a number and before I knew it they were gone.

When we met again in the vestibule I mentioned to Miguel how impressed I was.

"You should have seen this before the war at the height of the season," he said. "And I want you to know that it was the Carlists from Spain who put Biarritz on the map in 1838. Among the exiles was also Eugenie de Montijo, later empress of France. But you surely know that!"

"Yes, as it happened, I saw a movie dealing with that era."

December 18, 1939

Yesterday Miguel came earlier in the afternoon.

"Let's dump the children in their friends' house," he said with a grin. "We have a big program ahead of us."

I didn't question much, and packed the children who were delighted to stay with their friends downstairs, and off we went. First, we drove to our favorite spot near the water. The weather is unusually warm for the season and allows us still to sit on the rocks, where we watch the ever moving ocean, talk, dream and enjoy our physical and mental closeness. Communication is no barrier anymore, it has become easier and better.

"What are your big plans for today?" I asked.

"Well, I thought you might like to meet some of my friends who are preparing for a big celebration. You know, of course, Castillo and Xavier, but there are also Paco and Suzanne who live in a beautiful house in La Negresse. Then you haven't met Julian and Gabrielle, although you do know Antonio and his friend Adrienne. Another couple, from Cuba, will

be there. They are planning a dinner party in celebration of the sinking of the German battleship Graf Spee, and they all want you to come too.

I was curious to find out more about them. I had never been in any of these old French houses, and was anxious to meet all the foreigners. It is a new world for me. The villa, built in Spanish style, as are most of the houses in that region, stands in a large but somewhat neglected garden in the shade of old trees whose wide-spread branches form a wide and protective canopy over the house. Entering the villa, I found myself in a vast room filled with big armchairs, low Spanish-type coffee tables, a concert piano and walls covered with filled bookcases. On one of the tables stood a variety of wine bottles and glasses. Suzanne, the French hostess, and Paco, her Argentine husband—or boyfriend—greeted us warmly, and everybody seemed friendly, outgoing, almost exuberant. The different spoken languages filled the atmosphere with a lot of noise. In spite of the boisterous conduct of all present I did not take part in the general gaiety. I felt awkward and strange. They drank many martinis (that's what I think it was) and gossiped about people I didn't know. I do not like martinis—they make me sick. Miguel forced me to have a delicious Spanish Sherry which I did enjoy. I had started to inspect the paintings on the walls when the hostess clapped her hands and called us into the dining room—a spacious hall with a long table in the center, twelve heavy chairs around it, and sideboards alongside the walls. Beautiful antique chandeliers enveloped the festive table with a splendid light, enhanced by large mirrors on the wall. Miguel sat down on my left and Castillo on my right. The servant brought in steaming wooden bowls, and set one in front of each person. The animated conversation stopped. I looked at the contents of the bowl and could not control a feeling of horror. There were

little white worm-like creatures swimming in sizzling oil, heavily smelling of garlic. I felt irresistible repugnance, but the others seized their spoons and dug in. Ooh's and aah's filled the room. I felt my throat closing and my stomach rising. While I wondered what to do, Miguel gave me an encouraging nudge.

"These are angulas, tiny unborn eels, prepared in a very tasty sauce. Try them! If you think you can't eat them, close your eyes and at least take a few!" And watching me curiously with a grin on his face, he followed my movements. I took a hasty gulp, overcame my repulsion and followed his advice. Afterwards I admitted they were delicious, though horrible to look at. The repast took a long time and between each course we toasted to the sunk battleship, resting off the coast of Uruguay.

When we finally sat down in the salon, sipping strong aromatic coffee, some of the guests suggested we play records and dance. The Argentine and Cuban couples showed off tangos and other Latin American dances.

"Can you show us a typical Czech dance?" Suzanne asked.

"I wish I could, but I need a partner, a Moravian costume and the right music," I replied laughingly. Miguel and I danced together the rest of the evening.

December 19, 1939

Rena made two announcements to me. With loud fanfare she declared she had invited to our home Mirko, a former boyfriend from Bratislava, to spend Christmas vacation with her. He was at present in Agde, a town in the South of France, serving in the Czech army and feeling very lonely and homesick. He too, had escaped from home during the upheaval while

the German army had occupied the country, and when war had broken out had joined the Free Czech Army in Agde. For some time he had been writing Rena love letters, saying he would love to see her again and pick up where they had left off. He could take a few days' furlough if she would invite him. Rena, who had become restless and somewhat bored with small-town life in St. Jean, greeted with enthusiasm this opportunity to bring some excitement into her life and quickly agreed to his coming. He was to arrive shortly before Christmas. She had, however, to make a short trip to Paris before. Her husband had initiated steps to arrange their emigration to the United States and needed her to be present at certain formalities. Being Slovakian citizens and holding Slovakian passports they had less difficulty not only with the Slovakian but also with the French and American authorities.

Rena wanted to be back at the same time Mirko would arrive. I kept busy with the preparations and had very little time to be with Miguel. I prepared the Christmas tree for the children, their gifts, baked a variety of pastries and prepared the home for a festive mood. Miguel came for short visits only to inquire about me, each time bringing something he thought would please me. He knows I love to eat before dinner the big oysters for which the coast is well known. Rena also loves them and generally I have a hard time to get my share, since I can hardly cope with the speed Rena makes them disappear. For once, I can savor them without having to hurry.

December 25, 1939

Rena arrived in the nick of time on Christmas Eve, loaded with more gifts for everybody. I had just enough time to prepare the guest room and then we went together to the train station. The train arrived

and everybody's suspense was high until we caught a glimpse of an elegant man, dressed in civilian clothes, descending the steps. The children yelled "Uncle Mirko" and Rena fell into his arms. The introduction was short, with a warm handshake. He kissed the children who stuck to him like burrs. Then we all walked excitedly home.

After we had settled down in the livingroom, and the children had been sent to bed, we shared a bottle of brandy and each other's stories.

Mirko told us how he had escaped from Czechoslovakia together with some friends at the time of the German takeover. They had got out clandestinely, traveled as well as they could under extremely difficult circumstances, traversed Rumania and Yugoslavia, until reaching France. Here they had joined the Czech army-in-exile. He said everyone in the barracks feels bitter about not having been allowed to fight from their fortifications at the German borders. They were well-equipped and had been ready to fight back, their army strong and their spirits high. They felt the politicians only got them out of the trenches with a trick and lie. Shadows circled his eyes. With a shrug he tried to efface his memories.

"But now I want to forget and enjoy the few days I am here." So saying, he flung his arm around Rena, pulled her toward him, and kissed her. This was a signal for me to leave.

December 30, 1939

I had a busy week. Rena was head over heels busy with Mirko. The children had no school and clung to my skirt. Marketing and cooking was hectic. But I managed to concoct decent meals in spite of my limited culinary prowess.

Miguel came over for short visits as he knew I was busy. But he wanted to make sure that we celebrate New Year's Eve together.

"Make yourself beautiful," he teased me, "we are going to have a special dinner, just the two of us, and it should be a memorable one."

December 31, 1939

Hitler gave a New Year's message: "The Jewish capitalistic world will not survive the twentieth century."

New Year, 1940

Miguel took me to the Café de Paris in Biarritz. It was the epitome of a gracious and luxurious restaurant. The maitre d' showed us to our table which was ready in a corner and far enough from the dance parquet, allowing us to enjoy our meal in harmony and without disturbances. A pianist played soft music and the waiter performed subtly excellent service.

I felt transported to an unreal world. Magic surrounded me. Everything was delicious.

"After dinner, we shall have a bottle of 'Veuve Cliquot' to celebrate the entrance of the New Year," Miguel promised, "and then we shall dance until we drop dead."

We dined leisurely while I tried to chase away harmful thoughts which frequently spoil my pleasure. The champagne arrived the same time as the dance band. The musicians fussed and fidgeted with their instruments and finally started to play with a sudden impulse of energy and fire. Ceremoniously, the waiter poured the bubbling liquid into the crystal glasses and withdrew behind the heavy curtains. Miguel was about to raise the glass for a toast when I stopped him.

"Wait a moment, I have to go to the bathroom."

"Oh!?"

"I don't have any money."

There I was, without any money, in an extremely elegant and expensive establishment where the attendant in the ladies' room expects a generous tip. Should I go in and feign ignorance of these habits and ignore the outstretched hand of the woman? I would not dare and rather admit to Miguel. It was not that I had forgotten to put any money into my purse—I simply don't have any money at all. The pocket money I receive usually is gone the first week of the month.

I had no choice but to ask Miguel for money. The humiliation was almost unbearable, and if Miguel had not burst into loud and hearty laughter, the evening would have been completely ruined for me.

Miguel understood how I felt and, still asmused, gave me the money.

"I lend it to you, but promise to return it to me at the beginning of next months," he said, still laughing.

When I returned, we raised our glasses, toasting the New Year.

"I am afraid of what it might bring," I said. "The war has only started,and God knows what is waiting for us."

"Don't worry—you can't change the events. They will take their course, whether we worry or not. All we can do is prepare ourselves to be strong."

We danced until late in the night. At the end the band played the latest hits "We're going to hang out our washing on the Siegfried Line," and "Somehwere in France ..." and everyone sang along. I felt happy in Miguel's protective arms, and thought that nothing in the future could erase this moment.

March 9, 1940

Spring arrived and Easter with the awakening of nature isn't far off. The trees started to set little blossoms on their bare branches. Tender leaves burst open on the tamarisk trees that grow on the walkways alongside the seashore. The first flowers show their colorful heads coming out from under the protective soil. But the season that usually instills people with hope seems to have lost its customary magic. The windswept beaches, showing still some vestiges of past winter storms are empty, only a few children are playing in the sand, loose dogs are chasing each other, and a few white-breasted seagulls are spending their days on nearby rocks watching for careless fish swimming too near the surface.

Today I took the children for a walk. Everybody who enjoys observing the homecoming of the fishing fleet strolled toward the little harbor. We always like to watch the unloading of the catch. Some fishermen who had not gone out were painting their boats in vivid blues and reds adding even more color to the whole scene. For a while the girls chased each other around the empty bandstand in the center of the square. It especially attracts them because of its resemblance to a big carousel. Huge plane trees grow there and in summer cover the whole area with dense foliage that offers welcome shade to the people on the benches below. But now the plane trees are still bare. They look cold and funny with their heavily pruned branches that have on each end a balloon-like growth. They remind me of monkeys' heads.

After their hide and seek game, the girls got tired and sat down on the low wall that separates the square from the water and observed the activities. Soon it started to get cool and I urged the children to return home. But Vera, who often is obstinate, refused and finally started

to cry. There was nothing—no persuasion, no strict order that could make her budge. She had one of her tantrums, threw herself on the ground and screamed. I left her there for a while and set out to leave. I waited behind a tree, observing the child, when a young woman approached Vera, pulled her up from the pavement and started to talk to her. Vera, finally stopped screaming, and though still sobbing, joined me.

The woman and I started a conversation broaching child psychology.

"One always imitates the other and especially bad behavior," I told her. "They have been left alone too often, and have developed a mind of their own. They have become so independent, it's difficult to impose authority. Showing them love and warmth doesn't always work."

"But they are such pretty little girls. It's hard to believe they can be such devils," the woman said.

"Yes, that's what makes it so much harder to be strict with them."

rch 15, 1940

Early this morning, a surprise telegram arrived. It was from Misha—good old Misha—who now lives in London. We were friends in Brno. We last met in Paris on his stop-over to England, and since then had lost contact. The contents of the telegram are very puzzling:

MY GOOD FRIENDS THE LEHMANS, ARE IN MARSEILLE, HOTEL NICE, PLEASE HELP THEM, STOP. REGARDS MISHA.

What on earth was I to do? I re-read it several times. What kind of help do they need? And what kind of help could I, of all people, offer? I, myself, am not far away from needing help. But anyhow, I decided to send the following message to the Lehmans:

AM MISHA'S FRIEND, STOP. CAN I HELP. WHAT DO YOU NEED, STOP. ZDENKA VODAK

March, 20 1940

Today there were two letters in the mail box. One, from the Czech Consulate, asked to send in all my documents and passport in order to update my status of reliable citizen. What a dangerous situation. The possibility of being caught without documents scares me, but I suppose I must comply. The other letter was from Rena who had postponed her return from Paris several times, but now promised she would be back soon. Again, she has invited Mirko, about to go into action with his squadron. She wants to offer him a last pleasant Easter holiday. She arrives next Wednesday, and Mirko, from Agde, the following day.

March 25, 1940

On our way to the station I mailed all my French documents and Czech passport to the Czech Consulate in Paris. I hope I'll soon get them back safely. I feel lost without them. They are just about my only identification.

When the train from Paris arrived, there was no Rena. The children were very disappointed and I had a hard time consoling them. I was worried, but back at home we found a message from Rena, asking to call her in the evening.

"What happened?" I asked on the phone. "The children cried all the way home from the station. How can you do that to them?"

"Wait until I tell you. A new French law has come out requiring travel permits for all foreigners. Apparently I will get it, but it will take a few days. Isn't it awful? Just when it is so important that I be in St. Jean."

"What am I supposed to do with Mirko? Isn't there a way to let him know he should postpone his trip?"

"He is already on his way. Besides it wouldn't be fair to spoil a soldier's pleasure and these might be his last vacations. He seemed so happy to be able to get away for a few days from the drudgery of the military."

"So, what do you want me to do?"

"His train arrives tomorrow morning at 9:30. Meet him and bring him home. Tell him my misfortune and tell him I am heartbroken. Be nice to him and try to make up for my absence."

This is the darndest thing, I thought. I have been in strange situations before, but this is the most embarrasing.

I stopped at Miguel's place and told him the latest development. He was furious and the blood seemed to drain from his face.

"I can't let you sleep alone with a strange man under the same roof."

"But Miguel, be reasonable. There is nothing to worry about. First of all, he is Rena's guest, and I have nothing to say in this matter, and second, he is Rena's boyfriend. What kind of a person do you think I am? Do you have so little confidence in me?" With these words I left him, quite angry, but at the same time pleased to know that for once he showed a little jealousy. His perfection sometimes had even frightened me.

March 31, 1940

Mirko arrived. He appeared with buoyant step, hugging a small case under his arm, this time dressed in his uniform, looking more like a movie star than an ordinary soldier. The children greeted him excitedly and didn't let him out of their sight. They took turns at climbing on

his arms and knees, embracing him. How strange, I thought. They never show such love and excitement when their father visits from Paris. But then, has their father ever shown them much affection? Mirko was disappointed about Rena, but took the news philosophically. I was relieved, as I'd feared he would be terribly upset.

As it turned out, Mirko was more than philosophical. He was horny. Yes, he tried to seduce me! But when I firmly refused, he was nice enough about it. Still, I can't help wondering what Rena would think if she knew. Would she be angry? Hurt? Jealous? Feel betrayed? Vengeful? I think not. I think, knowing Rena, she would just laugh.

ril 5, 1940

At 3 o'clock this morning I was in the middle of a deep sleep, dreaming I was skiing down a steep hill, Miguel at my side. I felt the cold wind whipping my cheeks. It was exhilarating and I felt happy. Suddenly Miguel stumbled and fell head over heels in the deep snow. He seemed to be badly hurt. I stopped and was calling for help when I saw in the distance a Red Cross ambulance and heard its siren. At that moment I woke up and could still hear the sound of the ambulance. But it was the doorbell. My heart pounding, I stumbled to the door.

"For God's sake, what are you doing here Miguel? It's 3 o'clock."

"May I come in?"

"Of course, but what happened—are you sick?"

As soon as I'd rubbed my eyes and could see clearly, I knew something serious had happened. He was pale and his face looked drawn. He sat down on the couch, and I beside him, my arm around his shoulder, stroking his hair.

"I just received news that my mother is dying. One way or another

I must get back to Bilbao. There are things that have to be done."

"Is this possible now?"

"I will have to pull strings, and fast."

He looked into my eyes, and took my head in his hands.

"You know what this means. I don't want to think of it."

I hurried to make a pot of coffee. When I came back he was pacing back and forth. Then, sitting down and taking the cup, he seemed to be talking only to himself.

"I'll have to see the consul first thing in the morning, get a permit from him and from the French, pack all my belongings, go to the border and hope for the best."

For a while we could only stare at each other. Then Miguel got up to leave, and we kissed as if we never expected to meet again.

And that is how I think it will be. In a star-crossed world such as this, lovers have no chance. No chance at all.

April 6, 1940

Yesterday, Mirko, the children and I spent the afternoon in Biarritz, ate at the Petite Caravelle, a tearoom built on a rocky promontory. Large picture windows offered a wide-angle view of agitated waves of the stormy sea. Just as it looks inside me, I thought.

It was almost dark when we came home. There were two letters in the mail box which Mirko picked up and put in his pocket. The children were tired and went to bed without the usual protests. Mirko made coffee and brought it into the living room.

"Oh, I almost forgot, there was one letter for you and one for me," and reaching into his pocket he handed me the little blue envelope and

kept the big one. Hastily I broke it open, glanced at it and let it drop to the floor.

"He had to leave in a hurry—he is gone—gone for ever." For a long time we sat in silence. I don't know how long. Finally Mirko remembered his envelope and opened it.

"Return immediately to the base," he read.

April 30, 1940

Europe is in aproar. After eight months of inaction, Hitler opened his Western front and Denmark and Norway were quickly overrun.

May 20, 1940

May 19th, the German Army crossed the frontiers of Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. Amsterdam and Rotterdam are in ruins. Heavy smoke blackens the sky over Holland.

Iay 31, 1940

Yesterday the evacuation began of British, French and Belgian troops, somewhere around Dunkirk. I think of Johnny. God help him!

ıne 1, 1940

Returning home from a walk, I found in my mailbox a summons to the police commissariat, to be at their office the next morning. I couldn't imagine what the reason could be. I couldn't think of any wrong-doing, unless I hadn't covered my windows well during the nights. The black-out is a strict necessity.

This morning I walked the short distance through the rue Gambetta to the square adjacent to the port. I was surprised to find the Commissariat,

a low, unobtrusive building, so near the impressive "Maison de l'Infante" where the Infanta Maria Teresa stayed before her marriage to Louis XIV. A thin mustached policeman, in his blue uniform, was sitting in the smoke-filled room at a shabby wooden table, smoking a strong Gitane cigarette. The only decoration was a large photograph of Premier Reynaud, on the wall behind him. The previous change of leader was conspicuously evident since the picture of an earlier premier must have covered more space and left an ugly blank border. The windows of the building were small, and very little daylight came in from outside. Dim light from a shadeless electric bulb scarcely added to the gloom. When I entered, he looked up from sheets of papers strewn over the table.

"Good morning," I greeted and showed him the summons. He motioned me to follow him, and went through a heavy door into a somewhat bigger room dominated by a large desk at which a heavy-set man sat. Behind him hung yet another picture of Premier Reynaud. The man introduced himself: Monsieur Cazauran, Commissair de Police." He scrutinized me from top to bottom, motioned me to a chair with one hand and with the other took the cigar out of his mouth, depositing it on a big ashtray. In front of him was a dossier which he grabbed with both hands and started to turn over the pages. After a few minutes, he started to interrogate me: name, nationality, where and when I was born and many more detailed questions. I wondered what the reason might be, and couldn't imagine where it was leading to.

"Do you know a Mr. and Mrs. Lehmann?"

"No," I replied, without batting an eyelash.

"Think again," he urged me with an insisting tone which gave me the impression that he did not believe me. Suddenly I remembered the telegram.

"Oh, yes," I said slowly, "I do remember now. I sent a telegram to people in Marseille, with that name. Some time ago I had received a

telegram from a friend of mine in England, asking me to help his friends of the name. As I didn't know what kind of help they needed, I wrote a few words to that effect. But I never received any answer and I forgot about it.

"How can I believe this?"

"I don't know, but I might still have the telegram in a drawer at home. And if you wish, I will try to find it and bring it to you."

"All right, young lady, but I'll come with you."

We didn't talk much on the way and when we arrived at our apartment, I invited him to sit down, putting a bottle of cognac and a small glass in front of him while I searched for the telegram. Luckily, I still had it, buried under other papers, and jubilantly handed it to him. I don't know whether it was the cognac or the telegram that made him softer and friendlier. All of a sudden, he did not appear to be a policeman but rather a friend enjoying a pleasant interruption to his dreary duties.

"I hope I have explained everything to you in an understandable way, as my French is not too good."

"Oh, very well, mademoiselle. Besides your French is very good. But should you wish to become more fluent, I would be only too happy to give you some instructions," he added with a smile and pouring another shot of cognac into his glass.

I felt relieved, smiled at him too, but ignored his offer for further instruction. Instead I asked pensively, "I wonder why these people never answered?"

"Now I can tell you what happened," he answered in a somewhat pompous way. Mr. and Mrs. Lehmann, who apparently are Czech zitizens, had stopped in Marseille on an Italian ship bound for Argentina. Czech authorities

made him leave the boat, wanting to enlist him in the Czech army. He refused, explaining he had a valid visa for Argentina, and moreover, an important job waiting for him. He did not have a French visa and was being detained. Most probably his wife was desperate and did not know where to turn. He wouldn't elaborate on what happened afterwards or how it ended.

"I better get back to my office. Take care, young lady. I hope I didn't scare you too much."

June 9, 1940

Rena came back from Paris, packed her belonging, and headed back to Paris again with the children. It was the final move from here. Her husband has completed the necessary steps for their immigration to America. Since their departure, I had had to move out of the apartment into one room in the attic. Luckily, the Arbide family had decided on the spur of a moment to leave Paris and spend some time in St. Jean. I was able to find a very attractive apartment for them, and Michelle and I are happy to be together again. We have a lot to talk about.

My room, usually occupied by servants of families living in the apartments, has only the barest necessities—an iron bed, a small wooden table and chair, a few hooks on the wall for clothes, a washstand, and a hot plate for making tea; there is no heat or running water. Despite the ugliness of the room I feel very fortunate because the owners of the apartment house have let me have it rent-free. Of course, it is not meant to be a permanent arrangement but for the time being it gives me a place to stay.

une 15, 1940

Until recently the people of St. Jean have been rather blasé about

news of the war. But now we are face-to-face with the terrible truth. The German army bypassed the Maginot Line and advanced rapidly toward Paris. On June 10, the French Government hastily departed Paris with the destination of Bordeaux in mind. On June 14, German troops entered Paris. The glory of France is occupied! She has been declared an open city to save her from being bombed. Hitler and his hordes marched under the Arc de Triomphe and hoisted the Swastika over the Eiffel Tower, only one month after the blitzkrieg struck. Scattered French forces are still trying to fight back and retreat southward, but the bulk of the French army was trapped by the incredible speed of the blitzkrieg. Troops are splitting up into fragments, surrendering by the thousands without firing a single shot.

For days and nights a continuous flood of civilians has come fleeing down from the northern part of Europe. They use all kinds of vehicles—trucks, horse-drawn wagons, even push-carts and baby carriages, loaded with their meagre belongings. Panic can be seen on everyone's face. Many stall on the roads, unable to go on, or to refill their vehicles with gasoline. They continue on foot. They all have the same stunned look, unable to comprehend how France could have come to the brink of defeat in a matter of weeks. People tell horror stories of strafings by airplanes on the roads, of frightened people lying in ditches by the side of the roads, ducking under bushes, some badly wounded, trying desperately to find shelter. German planes fly over the main roads, swooping down with machine guns firing along the crowded highways, pursuing the fleeing populations. Some suffer in silence—their fear, horror and shock rendering them unable to utter words. They arrive on foot, exhausted, dirty, covered with dust, some with blood. It is complete chaos of refugees, and disintegrated societies.

A few French soldiers in dirty uniforms trudge along weaponless, their faces sullen with exhaustion. Women, separated from the families, seek them helplessly. I see all this with my own eyes, yet I am unable to grasp the reality. It is like a slow-motion film of Hell, recreated from Dante's Inferno.

June 17, 1940

St. Jean is overrun with a multitude of haunted people of many nationalities, people who do not know where to turn. They flocked to the last port where they might catch a ship. Shock and grief fill the whole town. The more fortunate people find hotel rooms and when there are taken, the refugees sleep on the floors in lounges and hallways, in tents or just simply on grass in the park. Sleeping figures cover empty places and mattresses line the sidewalks. Ships of all sizes arrive. St. Jean is the last port on the French side near the Spanish border, and the bigger ships that can't enter the port sit outside waiting to pick up people who can afford to pay their way—destination anywhere—from that pandemonium, away from fear, persecution and possible death. There is talk that any moment the Luftwaffe will bomb the little harbor. Terror reigns and tension grows with every advancing minute. The stores are empty, food has disappeared as if a hurricane had hit the town.

June 18, 1940

Today I walked through the suddenly crowded town, not knowing what to do or where to turn. I saw an old couple sitting close together on a torn mattress, staring into space without comprehension, waiting for some kind of miracle. A young man, unwashed, pale, with red-rimmed eyes testifying to many sleepless nights and dragging his knapsack, stopped

me in the street and asked where he could find a place to sleep. I learned he had been an employee at the Czech consulate in Marseille. He told me that after having burned all the files, the entire staff had left their offices and were now trying to reach England.

Pleased to have met a compatriot, I promised to accompany him to meet his boss, the consul. Perhaps I could obtain documentation of some kind for myself, enabling me to secure passage on a ship. All sat huddled in the lounge of the hotel, where I had been able to find accommodation for the consul due to my friendship with the manager. After we were settled, I explained to the consul how I had sent my documents to the Czech consulate in Paris, and was awaiting their return.

"You poor girl," he said. "The consulate in Paris destroyed everything before leaving for England, and that was some time ago. It is very doubtful that you will ever get them back."

"Can you issue me a new passport or similar documents?" I begged.

"Impossible, I don't even have a seal or stamped paper. I am extremely sorry." He explained that they had lost their heads and for fear that incriminating documents might fall into the hands of the Germans, had destroyed everything. It was an imperative measure to take, since they had the list of all the names and papers of our soldiers in France. All he could do was write a note stating that I am Czech, and sign it. But he doubted it would be of any significance or help, since he could not validate it with a consular seal.

How can I ever persuade any consul to give me a visa on the basis of this hastily issued paper!

June 19, 1940

This morning I got up early to meet Michelle. Just as I was ready to leave, I heard a knock at my door. The next moment I found myself in the arms of Pavel.

"My God! How did you get here? What happened? Are you all right?" He was obviously exhausted, dirty, and looked ill.

"If you are too tired to talk, lie down here and rest." I pushed him gently toward the cot.

"Let me wash up a little first," he said, barely able to stand. I brought in some water from the hallway, and while he washed I ran down to the deli for something to eat. It was closed—no food. After trying a few other shops, I finally found a fresh baguette which the baker had hidden beneath the counter, for sale only to regular customers. In the main charcuterie of the town I was also, under great secrecy, able to get a few patés and cheese.

I found Pavel stretched out on the cot, exhausted and writhing in pain. He had had to hitchhike some distance, since transportation was entirely disrupted. Hungry, he had not been able to find anything to eat but some raw potatoes. He had not eaten many, but enough apparently to make him sick. I made him some tea and after a few gulps he seemed to feel better. The cheese and patés did not seem like a good idea right now.

"Now you should rest and get some sleep!"

"Oh no, I can't sleep. I'm much too excited. Just knowing that I've finally arrived here and am with you is enough to revive me."

"If you think so, it is all right with me." I told him the Arbides were in St. Jean.

"As soon as you feel up to it, we'll go say hello to them. They're not far from here, and I'm sure they'll be happy to see you. Then you can tell us your story." I stroked his hair, and saw the healthy color coming back to his face.

He jumped up and exclaimed, "Let's go to the Arbides right now." With some trepidation I agreed.

At the Arbides he was greeted as a long-lost son. After we were made comfortable, and served imitation coffee, we encouraged Pavel to tell his story.

Here is Pavel's story, more or less as he told it:

> Our regiment was located in the North at the Maginot Line. At first there were only a few skirmishes, but when the German offensive began, all hell broke loose. During the last day of fighting I was wounded in my knee, given some shots and bandages, and told not to walk. But my choice was either to get out of there as rapidly as possible, or let them take me prisoner. I made a quick decision and left with a corporal from my batallion.
>
> Because of my knee I had lost contact with my regiment, but we managed on June first to reach our original headquarters in Agde, where what little was left of the Czech army had already embarked for an unknown destination, most probably for Africa. I received a travel order from the only Colonel still around, but had to get the seal from a Colonel of the nearby French garrison. There, fate stepped in, this time kindly. The French Colonel was

a Basque, and as it turned out he came from St. Jean. We became friendly, and while talking about his home town—the Bar Basque, Basque food and Basque Pelota—he signed all the travel vouchers for me and the corporal.

When we arrived at the train station we were stopped by a French military patrol, which confiscated our vouchers. I decided we had to find a way out of Agde and find a train depot which was not so heavily guarded. So we started to walk. My knee gave me a lot of trouble, but my mind was made up. We must reach St. Jean some way.

After many hours walking on side roads, we reached a small town. The park in front of the city hall was filled with sleeping figures, slumped in disarray—a dismal picture of desolation. Frightened people wandered anxiously among them, searching and calling out the names of children and aged parents who had become separated during the chaos. Part of the city hall had been converted into a soup kitchen, and after we had eaten I found a soft spot under a tree, wrapped myself in my military blanket, and slept until morning. My knee and leg felt painfully stiff, but after coffee and a few exercises I was ready to start again.

When we reached the town's railroad station we met about a dozen women, with their children. All trains had been cancelled and reinstatement of service was uncertain. The women, panic stricken, didn't know where to turn or what to do. I herded them together and told them to follow me. I didn't have a real solution, but felt somebody had to take care of them. Besides, I didn't want to risk being picked up again by the military garde mobile; the

sooner I was out of the station the better. The possibility of finding a train farther down the line seemed plausible to me, since I knew that all train service had been interrupted for several days. I figured they had to be somewhere.

We walked a few miles and, lo and behold, a train with only a few cars stood on a side track, ready to move on. My comrade and I hoisted the women and children through the windows, then we too climbed in, undetected. This time we were in luck, for the train's destination was Bordeaux. Finally, after twenty-four hours—deprived of any comfort, food or water—in an overcrowded compartment in the company of wretched women and moaning children, we arrived in Bordeaux. The city was crowded with refugees, panic was visible everywhere. The safest place for these poor women with their children would seem to be the harbor, where they might find passage on a ship to England. We left them there.

My friend and I tried to get into the French military barracks, but they refused to accept us. We went to the Red Cross, where we received some bread and black coffee, then to a barbershop, where we got rid of a week's growth of beard and were able to wash. Wherever we walked radios blared the Marseillaise. But what good was patriotic music doing us now, I thought.

My corporal had gone off on his own after we left the barbershop, and I was standing in the street wondering what to do next when suddenly I saw him coming toward me on a military motorcycle. I didn't ask him how he had got it—I didn't want to know. We took off, I riding comfortably on the back seat behind him. He stuck to empty country lanes all the way to Dax, a small vacation town in the hills, where he had a friend who owns a small

hotel. There we were finally able to sleep in a bed.

The corporal decided to stay in Dax. My main objective now was to reach St. Jean and to find you, Zdenka. I was worried to death, not knowing where you were or what had happened to you. But first I had to get rid of my uniform and find civilian clothes. The corporal's friend provided me with a shirt and an old pair of pants. He also suggested that I contact some local smugglers he knew who could guide me over the Pyrenees to Spain, a suggestion I rejected immediately. He understood my caution and unwillingness to do this, so he gave me a bicycle and sent me off, wishing me good luck.

At first it was not too bad, but after a few hours the hilly sideroads became almost impossible. I couldn't bend my injured knee, and had to push the bicycle. Vehicles and pedestrians, civilians and military people passed me, all fleeing in the same direction. Some were on horses, some even on mules, others on bicycles. Finally I abandoned the bicycle and was picked up by an old couple who gave me a lift in their cart drawn by an old horse. When I arrived in St. Jean, I went to the Café de la Poste, where they told me where to find you.

After Pavel had finished his account we sat in silence for a time, everyone immersed in his own thoughts. Finally Pavel stood up and turned to me.

"Let's go to the harbor and see what the rest of those lost souls are doing." Thanking the Arbides for their hospitality, he pushed me out the door. Intuitively I felt how tense and anxious he was in spite of his fatigue.

Outside, the streets were filled with swarms of people, everyone trying to reach the port, anxiously pushing forward, hoping to find a ship's captain who would accept their fare. People of all ages seemed obsessed by only one thought: Every man for himself! I heard many different languages but no one seemed to be listening.

When we reached the harbor we could see ships of all sizes, rocking on the waves. Sailors busied themselves on the decks, preparing for early departure. Everywhere there was tension in the air.

"Wait here for me. I'll see whether I can find a captain and arrange for a passage," Pavel disappeared into the crowd.

A tall man, dressed in blue slacks and blue turtle-neck sweater approached me.

"Would you like to keep my car? It's in excellent condition, and I have to leave it here." With a friendly grin he pulled out his car-keys and dropped them into my hand.

"It's a dark Citroen parked in the square behind the Hotel Euzcadia. Here, take it, she's all yours, and take good care of her. She has served me well and I'll miss her." I could hardly reply that I didn't want it, that I didn't know what I'd do with a car. Then another man handed me his key-ring with an address tag and said sadly as if to his car: "Good luck, my dear. This is the end of our terrestrial odyssey. Now begins the real one." He looked at me.

"Have you read Ovid?" Then, not waiting for an answer, he disappeared into the milling crowd.

So here I am, the owner of two cars, stuck at the end of the world, close to the barrier between possible destruction and doubtful escape, not knowing where to turn.

June 21, 1940

Pavel was unsuccessful yesterday in finding passage. This morning during breakfast, the radio interrupted its program with Marshall Petain's announcement of a pending armistice. The aged voice of the man who had once been a French hero trembled noticeably.

"At this sad hour my thoughts go out to the hapless refugees streaming down the roads of France in utmost destitution. It is with an aching heart that I say to you today that the fighting must stop."

Pavel leapt from the table.

"Let's not waste time. We must do something. We have to get away as fast as possible. The German army is advancing at incredible speed. It also is likely that the Luftwaffe will be over us any moment attacking the ships in the port. Let's go right now to the British consulate in Bayonne, and find out what escape they might be able to provide.

When we reached the Consulate we found it surprisingly quiet. The single employee, shrugging his shoulders deplored the fact of not being able to help. His only suggestion was to try to contact the "Free French," but he did not know where they could be found. Since the visit to the Consulate was our last resort, we had no alternative but to return, downhearted and dispirited, to St. Jean. Back in town, we mingled again with the crowd of defeated fugitives—all of us listening, talking, hoping to find a way out. Suddenly, over the radio amplified from a nearby building, came an unfamiliar voice, powerful and impressive. It was Charles de Gaulle, who hed fled to England, speaking over the BBC from London.

"France has lost the battle but France has not lost the war! France is not alone! This is a world war. Unite with me! The flame of French resistance will not be extinguished!"

"Dreamer!" a man next to me snorted.

"Wait here a moment," Pavel exclaimed. "I see an old Dutch acquaintance. I must speak with him."

I sat at an outdoor café table and watched the pushing crowd. Although I had told Pavel he would have to leave without me, I knew he was trying to get passage for both of us. I also knew that no captain would accept me without identification papers.

Suddenly Pavel reappeared.

"I got it, I got it!" he yelled jubilantly. His Dutch friend had introduced him to an influential Frenchman, who took Pavel to two ships that had recently arrived. One was the Sobieski, a Polish ship which carried Australian troops over to the Continent, and the captain had accepted Pavel. They were to sail right away—destination England. The captain was almost sure they would be attacked by German planes, but hoped to escape anyway.

We hurriedly made it back against the steady stream of people to bid farewell to the Arbides and pick up Pavel's blanket, soap, toothbrush—all his earthly possessions. Mama Arbide quickly prepared a simple meal and then we all accompanied Pavel to the ship. All of us feared an imminent air attack on the ships. Pavel was extremely apprehensive about leaving me behind.

The air was filled with words of farewell, promises, and breathless injunctions. Pavel and I kissed goodbye. There were no more words.

The crew busily scurried around the deck under the watchful eye of the captain. Whistles sounded, pennants were raised and flags hoisted. As much as I had tried to prepare myself, it came as a shock to see the ship weigh anchor. Pavel and I waved to each other until the people at the ship's rail were blurred dots.

Will we ever see each other again? Suddenly I had one last fleeting urge to run for my life. As I write this, I cannot stop the tears.

CHAPTER FOUR

June 23, 1940

"Let's go for a nice walk into the country side" Mama Arbide suggested. "Zdenka, come on, it will do you good." Everybody was emotionally exhausted and was glad to get away. Besides, the danger of being bombed in the harbor was very much on our minds. The rumor had been circulating that the German army would occupy the coast any time now. It seemed only too logical that the occupation would bring some bombing. We walked in silence, the excitement and pressures of the last days much in evidence; I felt tired and downhearted. Had it not been for the concern and insistence of my friends I would have gone home, buried myself under some pillows and let go my tensions with an outpouring of tears I had accumulated in me. But the Arbides persuaded me to accompany them. I followed reluctantly.

It was a hot afternoon, the sun shone brilliantly in the cloudless sky. Before reaching the open fields and meadows we had to cross the beautifully kept Chiberta Golf course. Not long ago swarming with international golfers, it was now completely deserted, more like an artificial park on a stage, in readiness for some drama. The tranquility seemed treacherous.

"Come on, let's take off our shoes and walk over the soft greens," Michelle nudged me. The cool moisture of the lawn refreshed our feet and they sank deep into the grass. We reached a slow-moving creek cutting

through the fields, and walked along it for a while. A thicket of blackberries appeared. Beyond it was a rich green pasture with a cluster of willow trees. We intended to walk there for a short rest before returning to town. Suddenly we heard the unmistakable buzzing of the motor of an airplane. Shock and terror grabbed us as the noise grew louder. Without further ado, we started to run toward the shelter of the willow trees.

"Oh God, why did I have to wear my red blouse today?" I moaned. "They can't miss that!"

By the time we reached the trees, the plane was already circling overhead. We ducked and Michelle threw her body over me to cover my bright red blouse and all stopped breathing for a moment. We expected to be gunned down but after circling, the plane swung away gracefully toward the sea disappearing in a distance in a wall of haze.

Deeply shaken we returned to town in complete silence. The streets were deserted. The shutters of the houses were closed, the curtains drawn. The unusual silence was oppressive. "What's going on?" we asked.

Suddenly a hum of approaching motor vehicles filled the air and almost simultaneously there appeared columns of German motorcycle troops and armored cars. We stood as though turned to stone. There was no time to hide in a doorway. We grimly watched the motorcade—hundreds of them, followed by heavy trucks carrying armed infantry. Then the olive-drab tanks came into sight and more helmeted soldiers, unsmiling with their blackened faces staring sternly ahead, not like living creatures. Tin soldiers playing a deadly game, I thought. Above the visors of their caps were silver skulls, glinting wickedly in the sun. The two lightning bolts on their collars made me shudder.

Is this what "Occupied Zone" means, I wondered. The smoldering spectrum advancing in a slow and rythmical tempo disappeared behind the

houses and the shock slowly subsided. We seemed to have been the only witnesses in town of the drama. The Arbides and I started to move again. Our steps were slow, our dispirited minds incapable of grasping the unbelievable truth.

June 30, 1940

The armistice is signed between France and Germany. It divides France into two zones, almost two foreign countries, with a demarcation line between. The Germans occupy more than half of France and govern it completely. South and east of the line has become the "Unoccupied Zone," governed by Pétain from the city of Vichy. St. Jean remains in the Occupied Zone—my luck!

The majority think Pétain is too old but no-one else has the confidence of the French. The local people have not yet recovered from their shock. The border between the two zones is closed and heavily garded. There is daily news of arrests of people trying to escape. The occupied zone has become a death-trap.

I wonder how to arrange my life, put things into perspective and how to make some money for my livelihood.

July 10, 1940

The effects of the occupation are felt everywhere. People who used to stop in the street and chat now walk sullenly looking in vain for food. Store windows display signs expressing the shortages. The tables in the sidewalk cafés are empty and remind me of fields ravaged by locusts. The sound of music is replaced by news on the radio blaring forth to emptiness.

July 20, 1940

The other day, coming down from the Arbide's apartment, I encountered

on the staircase Mrs. Granier, the owner of the building. We usually stop for a short interchange of courtesies, but this time our conversation took a more personal turn.

"Are you planning to go back to Paris with your friends?" she inquired.

"Oh, no, I wouldn't know how to start there, especially under the present conditions. Besides, I like St. Jean. A big city like Paris frightens me, particularly since all my friends are gone. I also love the ocean, its beauty helps to overcome my loneliness. In the big city nobody cares about the human needs of a person.

She nodded sympathetically. "What is your profession, may I ask?"

"I have my diploma in skin care and massage, but have done very little with it."

"What a coincidence! It so happens I know an elderly lady who lives in a little villa not too far from the cemetery. She always complains she cannot find a person here who would apply treatment in her home. Would you be willing to see her?"

"Certainly, with pleasure."

"Let me talk to her and give you the answer."

I was pleased with the conversation. Hopes mounted in my mind. I could see a possibility to make some money, although I feel I would have to be very careful to work clandestinely in so small a town as St. Jean, since this might quickly come to the attention of the police.

Mrs. Granier came to see me the next day and said Mrs. Laurant would be very happy if I could come to see her any morning before 10 o'clock.

July 25, 1940

Yesterday morning, equipped with my little suitcase containing the

beauty products, I walked over to the address Mrs. Granier had given me. A climbed a steep hill to a cul-de-sac and found the old villa hidden behind huge, pink blooming hydrangea bushes. Rambling roses grew over the walls of the two-story stone building, half covering the name "Les Goelands" in large green letters across the white background above the door. I rang the old-fashioned bell and waited. Nobody answered. I rang again and shortly heard shuffling footsteps nearing the door. When it finally swung open, there stood an antique lady in the doorway.

Ugh, I thought. I didn't expect that!

I was shown into a charming livingroom. All the chairs—and there were many—were covered with colorful cretonne, knick-knacks stood strewn upon warm-brown walnut furniture, and the air breathed "turn-of-the-century atmosphere.

"Take a seat, mademoiselle," Mrs. Laurant invited me with a friendly smile. After we had both sunk deep down into the soft wing chairs, she commanded: "Look me over well and tell me whether you can iron out my wrinkles."

I looked at the small bird-face. The tiny skull was covered with yellow paper-like skin. Thousand of wrinkles criss-crossed her face.

"Well, hm ..." I said and thought quickly, how to tell that old lady, without hurting her feelings, that it was impossibe to make those deep-seated cobwebs disappear. Finally, I said that repeated massage would refreshen her skin and make it looking healthier, but that it was difficult to iron out and erase wrinkles.

"Let's try," she encouraged me.

I worked on her for well over an hour in spite of feeling discouraged. After the treatment, Mrs. Laurant paid me more than I had asked for and

wished to make another appointment. I was evasive and said I would let her know. I walked slowly down the winding road and when I reached a bench, sat down, and still clutching the folded twenty Francs bill, I started to think. What was my moral obligation? I couldn't lie to people and at the same time make money. I felt sorry for the old lady, yet I know it is hopeless. I cannot bear to disappoint her expectations and illusions of restoring lost youth. At the school, I had always worked on young and middle-aged women, who expected the treatment to be relaxing and healthy. But they did not expect miracles. I would deprecate myself, were I to continue with this work. I realize now that I have wasted more than six months on these studies. But I also know that I have to come to terms with this disappointment. I have to look for another "modus vivendi.'

August 25, 1940

Michelle has gone with her parents back to Paris. The fear of Paris being bombed has vanished, and business has to go on, though under different conditions. For a farewell gift she has given me a beautiful black lace Spanish mantilla.

"Promise me to wear it when going to church every Sunday. Show it off and forget you are Jewish. People should see you and get to know you this way," she said while kissing me goodbye.

I am lonely. All the friends are gone and St. Jean has taken on a different picture. Grey-green uniforms are everywhere. Life starts to run normally, stores open again, though hardly offering any merchandise. At the beginning, the populace showed antagonism, many turning their hostility into distrust, but then into collaboration. "The Germans are so correct" was their resigned statement and then they started to accept them. Sometimes I even detect an open admiration towards them. Food is very scarce in spite of strict rationing. One has to devote considerable

time and energy to secure some provisions. I often cannot obtain the most basic food. It simply is not available. Black market prices govern secret purchases. Quality of everything has deteriorated, and leads to "imitation" of every-day needs. For weeks now my daily staple has been bread with mustard.

September 2, 1940

The other day eggs were distributed, two per person. People stood in line for hours. When I arrived at the scene I felt discouraged and humiliated. What are two eggs worth? While wondering whether to remain in the pouring rain unprotected and cold, a young woman next to me started to talk.

"Do I know you? You look familiar to me." I looked at her and recognized her instantly.

"Oh, yes, we met once when you took care of my screaming moppet and picked her up from the sidewalk."

"Now I remember you, of course. Where are the adorable children?"

"They left with their mother for Paris."

"And what are you doing now?"

"Practically nothing, though I would like to find work in a Spanish family. But first I'd have to be able to speak some Spanish. Would you know, by any chance, of a Spanish teacher? I can't pay much."

She smiled understandingly and extended her hand: "I am Maite Zabaleta." I introduced myself and she mistook my name as German.

"Oh no," I said, "I am Czech."

"Do you speak German?"

"Yes, I do, I'm bilingual. My schooling was in both languages and the town where I grew up was half German and half Czech."

"How wonderful! I have an idea. Why don't I give you Spanish lessons and you will teach me German? I think I'd better know some, the way things are going here."

So now I have a new acquaintance, possibly a friend, and I shall be learning Miguel's language. Tomorrow we are to meet at her place, and begin the "foreign exchange."

September 23, 1940

Three weeks ago Maite and I began our first lessons, and Maite seemed pleased with the way I had handled the material.

"Were you ever a teacher in your country?"

"Oh no," I said quickly. "But it is really easy for me, having had so much instruction in my life. Not only in living languages, but also in the dead ones. And I had good teachers and bad ones, so I am able to tell the difference."

"Excellent! It so happens that I run a private school in St. Jean, together with the Abbé Delacroix, and it is important that we start teaching German. Would you like to become our German teacher? The salary is not great, but once more students enrol we will be able to do better."

October 6, 1940

I accepted enthusiastically, and started my new job at once. There are enough students of all ages to make it challenging and interesting. A few of the older ones are being prepared for the baccalaureate. One in particular—Roger Deglisson—fascinates me with his attitude. He is the oldest one in the group, about eighteen I would guess, always neatly dressed, which helps make him stand out from the rest. From the very beginning he has sat there at his desk, arms crossed, simply staring at me. Is he trying to put me off balance? If so, why? Perhaps he hates to have to learn German, or does he possibly think I am German, but I

don't let it show; it is much too insignificant to let it affect my teaching. He will probably soon tire of this behavior. Besides, I remember from my own adolescent years the many pranks I and my classmates invented to annoy our teachers. Why should it be any different now?

October 14, 1940

I am anxious to read the latest news, though I don't believe half of what the papers report. The French press is simply German translated into French. They say that London suffers heavy raids every night, but lately they had to admit that the RAF has begun night bombing of Germany.

October 16, 1940

Hurrah—better late than never! Today I received my long lost passport with the rest of the papers, in the same envelope I mailed to the Czech Consulate months ago. Apparently it never reached the Consulate. Since all communication was interrupted long before the public was informed, it had remained in a post office until they found the time to return it. Should I call this bureaucratic efficiency? Well, whatever it is, I am happy to have back my documents.

October 23, 1940

My steady income at the present time allows me to make some changes in my life. I was lucky to find a charming bachelor apartment in the business section of town, above a business which belongs to the landlord. He used to rent it to vacationers for much more money but to me he made a special price, since there aren't any vacationers with the war, and besides he is afraid a German officer might requisition it. I am very excited; it is the first time in my life I can afford to rent nice living quarters with my own money.

It is a cozy apartment, wall-to-wall carpet harmonizing with the

reddish-brown walls. From the little entry-hall one door leads to a kitchen, tiny but well-equipped, where all appliances are hidden behind roll-tops. What a good idea! The second door opens on to the living-room. The day-bed alongside one wall is surrounded by cabinets and bookshelves. At the other wall stands a table which can be extended to double size and is flanked by two soft chairs. The third wall is taken by a chest of drawers, the top of which opens to a writing desk. An armchair covered with colorful French cretonne stands together with a low coffee table under one window. The view is on a small garden with a huge tree and several smaller bushes that intercept the view on roofs of other houses. There is a cabinet de toilette in an alcove divided by a heavy curtain. All in all it is a warm place, furnished in good taste and affords me a feeling of shelter.

I wrote to the Arbides in Paris about my luck and asked them to send me linens for bed, bath and kitchen which they are holding in storage for me.

I now spend most of my free time writing love letters to Miguel—in Spanish! Patiently I pick out from the Spanish dictionary the words, one after the other, struggling with grammar, writing line after line, to a ghost-like lover, who may or may not be in Bilbao, who may or may not be still alive.

October 25, 1940

Hitler had a meeting with General Franco at Hendaye. Many safety measurements were noticeable in St. Jean and its surroundings. I wonder whether Hitler had asked him to join in his war effort. After all, Franco owes him for his help without which he never would have reached his present position. I wouldn't be surprised if he entered the war as long as Hitler would promise to let him have Gibraltar.

October 26, 1940

I am beginning to make a name for myself. People seek me out asking for instruction. Since I teach classes at school in the mornings, which doesn't require much mental effort, I reserve the afternoons for private lessons. Madame Basteret, owner of the Grand Hotel in St. Jean, was the first to knock at my door. She is a beautiful and charming woman whose hotel was requisitioned by the German high command for its officers. She felt it imperative to be able to communicate with them since only a few speak French. The hours I spend with her are very pleasant and sometimes even amusing. I enjoy working with her.

Then there is Madame Duvalier, who owns a castle north of Paris, which too is occupied by some staff officers, and is forced to stay here. She also is a pleasure to be with and to teach.

Not long ago a pretty young French woman came to my apartment. She was shy and somewhat hesitant to talk. At first, I did not know what she wanted and had difficulties to make her start. After some coaxing, she took from her worn leather purse a well-thumbed sheet of paper.

"My name is Claire," she said somewhat embarrassad. "Would you be so kind as to translate this for me, and please forgive my boldness."

Looking at it, I realised it was a love letter, written in simple German. I translated it and returned the paper to her. Her face was flushed. After a moment's silence, she again opened her purse and asked what she owed me.

"Oh, nothing, Claire,—that is nothing. Come again whenever you receive a letter."

After that, Claire came almost every other day and I was surprised that a German soldier would faithfully write so often. I asked her whether

she knew where her boyfriend was located, since he spoke in his letter of marriage, of his family and of beautiful future plans.

"Oh, he is here in St. Jean," Claire responded with a happy smile. "He is here in St. Jean!" I exclaimed in surprise and disbelief. "But why do you write each other all these letters?"

"Well, this is the only way we can communicate and be understood, since he knows no French and I don't speak German."

I broke out into an uproarious laughter which Claire joined in like a happy, innocent child.

October 28, 1940

Roger Deglisson is turning out to be a very interesting pupil indeed. Yesterday he pulled me aside after class, obviously with something on his mind.

"What are you doing here in this God-forsaken town during a time like this?" he asked, half-jokingly. "There are hardly any foreigners here anymore and you obviously are neither French nor Spanish."

"You are right."

"Are you German?"

"Certainly not. I am Czech."

He said my German was too good for being a Czech and that he suspected me of being a German.

"You are being facetious! I am not only a Czech," I replied, "but a 'good Czech.' I even have a paper to document it."

I invited him to accompany me home, and when we got here I went to the little chest of drawers, and pulling out a big envelope, extracted a sheet of paper. Triumphantly I held it under his nose. It was the certificat de fidelité issued by the Czech Consul in Paris, after my arrival

in France. After having read it carefully he put it down and looking me straight in the eyes asked, "Are you still a good Czech?"

"Of course, I am, more now than ever. There is nothing that could ever change that!" I felt his interest in my philosophy of patriotism was strange but it did not surprise me considering his unusual behavior in the classroom.

He regarded me for a moment with solemn eyes. "Then would you—if you ever hear or see anything that might help us against the Germans—just pass it on to me? I will know what to do with it."

Without hesitation I agreed, for there is little enough I have done, and this may be my chance to be a comrade-in-combat.

"Althouth I don't really know whether I would ever have the opportunity to overhear any secrets."

"One never knows. You would be surprised to know how much we have already learned through innocent remarks—in trains, in stores and restaurants. Just keep your eyes and ears open."

So I have told Roger I would. And I shall.

October 29, 1940

Another country is being pulled into war. This time it is little Greece that suffered the attack by Italy!

November 1, 1940

This morning I woke up early, and since it is All Saints Day—a holiday—I decided to go for a walk and pay a visit to the cemetery. A gentle morning breeze brushed against my cheeks like a balm. I leisurely walked up the rather steep road, flanked by tall cypress trees. At the entrance to the cemetery I sat down on a bench. The sky was gray and laden with heavy clouds, the ocean waves in the distance rolled lazily,

and the mountains seemed so close I felt I could reach out and touch them. The showy deciduous trees growing between the graves were alive with autumn colors. Brillant orange flowers and yellow laburnum graced virtually every grave. Withered leaves covered the grounds and smelled of outumn and earth. The South wind affected my mind.

People began to arrive with armloads of flowers. They laid them on the graves, lighted candles and knelt in silent prayers. Momentarily, my attention was distracted by a honey bee buzzing around my head. It finally settled on a late-blooming rose bush. How beautiful it all was, so peaceful, so silently ceremonial. I think I should like to be buried there.

Although I had no loved one buried there to mourn, my thoughts turned to Miguel. And Pavel. Were they now—possibly—in graves somewhere else? I have no way of knowing. I haven't heard from either since our last farewells. Did Pavel make it safely to England? If so, is he in London? How does one escape merciless bombing? And if one survives this horror, how will it affect his future life? Is Miguel safely in Bilbao? I know neither of them would have forgotten me, and would contact me if they could. Of course, the borders are closed and I cannot expect mail from foreign countries. The Occupied Zone belongs to the Germans, and the rest of the world is hostile territory. We are surrounded by an impenetrable, invisible wall.

Slowly I got up from the bench and made my way back down the road. Suddenly the sun broke through the overcast, and I took it as an omen that Miguel and Pavel are still alive.

November 7, 1949

President Roosevelt has been re-elected for the third time. I am very glad, though it will not make any difference to me or the rest of

the Jews who remained in Europe. But perhaps for the ones living in the United States. And there are more important things to be considered that are closer to the Americans. I can't help but wonder how life would have been had America opened up her doors for us who needed a sanctuary.

November 16, 1940

The Germans boast of their despicable air attack on the 14th of this month, whereby the cathedral of Coventry was completely destroyed. Isn't anything sacred to them?

December 1, 1940

Today I received two very important letters. It all seems to come at once, something to do with the postal service, I suppose. One had several strange postmarks all over the front. A Swiss Red Cross, French stamps and a Swastika with more German postmarks. With aroused curiosity I opened the first one. Inside was a post card from Czechoslovakia. With a racing heart I read the few typed lines: "I am here in Theresienstadt with our two aunts, Mathilda and Marie. We are O.K. and I am in charge of the town's only pharmacy. Do not worry, Love, Milan."

Automatically I had sat down in the chair and stared at the short note. Why couldn't he have written more? What is going on? And where—in hell—is Theresienstadt? And why is he there with our aunts? So many unanswered questions! I am happy, of course, to have received some news—any news—but how alarming!

Still wondering why they had moved to a Godforsaken little town I have never heard about before, I opened the second envelope, also covered with mysterious postmarks. Inside was a telegram in English: "Do you want to marry me? Love, Mirko." I looked again at the envelope to verify that it was no mistake. Yes, my name was correctly spelled out. Why would he

want to marry me? He is probably in England and I am behind an impenetrable wall. What sense does it make? I thought of many reasons but discarded one after another. Finally, I settled on the simplest one: He is homesick and lonely. He needs to think of a person, possibly coming from the same country as he, of whom he is fond and to whom he can relate. It would give him a feeling of belonging.

At first, I discarded the idea as out of the question but then I thought—why not? Accepting his proposal might help him overcome loneliness and accept the hardship of war. As for myself, I know I am a fool but as long as I know that my acceptance will help him in some way I might be doing the right thing. Of course, I don't love him.

Dec. 20, 1940

It took quite some research to find out where to find the International Red Cross that would forward my answer. I wrote: "Yes, I do and I love you very much." The feeling of doing something good and worthy, in supporting a friend, helped me over the guilt feeling about this great lie. From now on I will feel the responsibility of being Mirko's fiancée and write him regularly if the Red Cross is willing to forward my letters.

Janyary 15, 1941

After the Christmas holidays, at school, Maite asked me after class to step into her office for a minute. At Maite's desk sat a nun, very erect and resting her long, bony hands in front of her.

"Sister Therese, this is Zdenka." Maite motioned me to a chair. Maite came to the point right away.

"Zdenka, I have talked to Sister Therese about you and what a good teaching job you are doing. She would like to add German to the curriculum in her school at Hendaye, and I suggested you for the job."

At this point Sister Therese broke in to say there were approximately fifteen fourth graders who would need instruction twice a week.

"Would you be willing to accept this job, Mademoiselle Vodak?" Her manner was coolly businesslike.

I answered without hesitation. "I would be very happy to accept the job, but right now there is no bus going to Hendaye, and to take the train is very inconvenient. But let me see if I can work it out. May I give you my answer tomorrow?

"Certainly, I can wait until then." The interview was over.

On my way out I met in the hallway Joanne Wallace, the English teacher with whom I have exchanged a few polite words in the past but never had the opportunity for a more extended conversation. She is a skinny, homely woman of about forty. Her very dark hair is sprinkled with prematurely graying strands making her look older. Her voice is surprisingly soft and melodious which captured my attention right away. I felt attracted to her immediately.

"I have been wanting to meet you," I said, shaking her hand. A pleasant smile completely changed her expression.

"And I have looked forward to meeting you, too. Why don't we go find a place where we can talk and have a cup of something at the same time?"

"Fine, let's go to the 'Vauban.'" We sat down and sipped the coffee substitute.

"I am surprised you are not in Paris," I said.

"Let me explain it to you. I taught English in Paris for a few years and when I spent my vacation here last summer, I fell in love with St. Jean, applied for this job and stayed here."

"Don't you have difficulties with the Germans?"

"Fortunately not. But it is not suprising, as I am a French citizen. Though my father was South African, my mother is French. I grew up partly in England and partly in Paris and my education was in both languages. But how come you are here?"

I told her how it happened. After talking a while we felt we had known each other for a long time. Before leaving for home, I told her about the latest job offer in Hendaye and my hesitation.

"Why don't you get yourself a bicycle—that would solve your transportation problem."

"That's a great idea. I wonder why it never occurred to me!" I said laughingly.

January 30, 1941

I have bought myself a bicycle. At first my legs felt a bit wobbly, and I careened from one side of the road to the other. What I had done so skillfully in my teens wasn't coming back easily. But by Monday I felt confident enought to travel to my first day on the job by bicycle.

The road is winding and very hilly. I was surprised to see long stretches of beautiful empty beaches. A slight mist hovered above the line where water and sand met. Seagulls floated offshore. I sat down on a rock and rested for a while. The sky had that watered blue silk look one finds on a cool winter day. Breath kept hanging in the air. The few stucco houses near the beach seemed deserted, huddled next to each other surrounded by pine trees.

The last stretch of the road was all downhill, and in no time I parked my bicycle in front of a low simple building with a spacious yard behind. A tower stood at one side, which I later learned housed a big

bell, usually rung, with the help of a long rope, by Sister Therese.

She was expecting me and greeted me at the entrance.

"And how was the bicycle ride, Mademoiselle Vodak?"

"Hmm ...," I said, "not bad."

The classroom was cold and bare. The children were sitting very quietly on their benches, curiosity lighting their faces. All were dressed in dark clothes partially covered by big black aprons. Many had huge shawls wrapped around their necks and shoulders. I had the impression they were apprehensive. Obviously they were accustomed to strict discipline.

"I am Mademoiselle Vodak, and I would like to get to know you better. Now, will you call out your names, and tell me something about yourselves. Tomorrow I'll start to teach you a new language."

My return home was strenuous. The winding road, mostly uphill, made me realize the onerous task I had taken on. How will I be able to fight the frequent inclemencies of the winter weather. While pushing the bicycle on long stretches I feared I had agreed too quickly to this commitment.

March 2, 1941

Last Thursday I came home to find a short note from Rena, who was in Paris: On Thursday I'll be in Bayonne to ask for a transit visa for Portugal and will spend one night in Biarritz. I'd love to see you—will you come and join me there? I have already made reservations in the Hotel Suisse. Bring your overnight case.

Good Lord, I thought, that's tonight! She most probably is preparing for their emigration to the United States. I hope she receives the visa!

I called off the lesson with Madame Basteret. The rest of the day I was fortunately free. Late afternoon I took the train to Biarritz. From

the station I walked directly to the hotel, but Rena was not yet in. The lobby was pleasant and the hotel seemed quite luxurious. I took my book out and read for some time. I was deeply into the novel when a deep voice and clear laughter interrupted me:

"I'm glad you could come and am happy to see you," and stretching out her arms, she pulled me against her chest and kissed me on both cheeks.

"I hope you stay with me overnight, we have to talk about a lot of things. Let's sit down somewhere in a café and later on we'll have dinner together. I hope there is a restaurant somewhere here where they still serve decent food." She didn't give me any time to think and added quickly:

"Don't worry, we might as well go where I had dinner last night with Xavier—you do remember him, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, he was one of Miguel's friends and the only one I didn't like. He was from Argentina, I believe, very rich and always in search of girls."

"That's the one. He also knew everyone from the embassies in Bayonne. That's why I contacted him. Let's go. Today money is no object!"

I suggested the "Petite Caravelle" for a drink and a chat. I often had been there with Miguel, and sweet memories came to my mind when we sat down. I looked out the big picture-window and my eyes followed the high waves of the rough ocean. Don't let memories get you down, I reprimanded myself and turned my attention to the radiant Rena.

"Did you obtain your visa?" I asked.

"Didn't I! Can't you see it on my face?" she said with a bright smile.

"Wasn't it difficult?" I asked, remembering my unsuccessful

attempts. "Tell me all about it."

"First we received an affidavit from my husband's business partners in New York, which was the opener to the immigration visa to the States. All the other formalities took quite some time, and money of course. Then we received the French exit visa, but in Paris it was impossible to obtain the Portuguese transit visa. We were already desperate, since even money didn't help. Then I remembered our friend Xavier."

"That creep! I am surprised he's still around—he probably deals with the Germans, doing some black market business with them. I wouldn't be surprised. He was one of the very few men in St. Jean I couldn't stand."

"Never mind, he was useful to me. Of course, he would not accept money."

I knew, of course, what he had accepted.

We talked for a long time until dinner, in a small secluded restaurant. How long has it been since I had such decent food, I thought, and couldn't remember.

"Why don't we go to a nightclub and celebrate," Rena suggested, as always never tired and ready for action.

We sat down at a small table for two and ordered cognac with charged water, the substitute for Scotch and soda. There were surprisingly many people and considerably more men than women. A live band played and a few couples danced. We had hardly had our first sip when a very elegant man asked Rena to dance. A few minutes later another man asked me and I accepted reluctantly. I danced a few rounds but did not enjoy it and refused several other invitations. I was not used anymore to going out, and wanted to go home, but Rena seemed to enjoy it and stayed a long time on the dance floor. When she finally came back to our table, I reminded

her of the curfew, but she refused to leave so early and suggested we stay until early morning when curfew would be over.

"Let's stay, the guy I'm dancing with is a charming gentleman and he asked me to stay longer. When I mentioned the curfew, he said he would take us home in his car."

"In his car? He must be a black-marketeer if he can afford to buy gas! I didn't even know there was gas still available."

"How do I know? I didn't ask, and I don't care."

I yielded to Rena's wish.

After several more hours of dancing and additional drinks, Rena finally agreed to leave. She brought to the table her dance partner and introduced him. We talked animatedly in spite of the advanced hour. Paul was a likable man, elegantly dressed, with perfect manners.

"I'm sorry to hear that your friend has to return to Paris so soon. Do you live in Paris too?"

"No, I live here—actually in St. Jean."

"Oh good, then I might see you here again?"

"Maybe, but now I can hardly keep my eyes open, besides I am not used to having so many drinks."

"Don't worry, I'll bring you home safely."

Outside, in the dim light of dawn stood an elegant limousine adorned with flags, one showing the German eagle and the other one the ubiquitous swastika. A uniformed chauffeur who stood there at attention opened the door right away. My heart skipped a beat and I tried to pull Rena back.

"No, no, let's walk, he obviously is a Gestapo man," I whispered into her ear.

"We don't have an alternative, we can't back out now," Rena muttered.

In the car we stayed mum. I trembled with fear while thinking: Oh God, two Jewesses in a Gestapo car—how dreadful and how dangerous!

When we arrived at the hotel, he very correctly accompanied us to the door and kissed our hands. We said goodbye hastily, and ran quickly inside. When we were safe in our room we burst into hysterical laughter.

Next morning we embraced for the last time. At the last moment, Rena remembered she wanted to give me the address of Ilona, a Hungarian friend of hers now living in Biarritz. Since I had some time left and the farewell from Rena had left me in a sad mood, I decided to call on her. Her hotel was easy to find, standing on an attractive square, surrounded by old shady trees, high above the beach, with a wide view over the ocean. Ilona was in her room when I arrived but came down immediately when she heard I was a friend of Rena's.

Ilona is about the same age as Rena, very attractive, with beautiful blue eyes, gold-blond hair and extremely well groomed. Her clothes seemed to have come from famous Parisian couturiers. She seemed pleased with my visit.

"How come you live here and not in Paris?" I asked.

"My husband wanted me out of his way. He is now living with a French girl—much younger, of course. Thank God, I had fallen out of love with him. Had I stayed in Paris he wouldn't have given me a penny. At least here he supports me regally. I guess this eases his conscience. Of course, I could go back to Budapest, but I wouldn't give him that pleasure. What other recourse do I have?

"Do you have a French residence permit?"

"Yes, of course. We arrived in France a long time before the war. I don't expect to have difficulties with the Germans as I have a certificate

of baptism which we bought shortly before leaving Hungary."

We chatted much longer, talking about our backgrounds and the general atmosphere currently in France. When I got up to leave, she insisted that we meet regularly. She too feels isolated and lonely, yet I sensed an inner vitality beneath her quiet composure.

April 7, 1941

Today I received a call from the French Commissariat. Since I had not answered their summons to register as a foreigner, a French policeman was dispatched to order me to appear at the police station right away. There everything seemed the same except the change of the picture on the wall. Premier Reynaud had been replaced by Marshal Petain. I was greeted by my old friend Monsieur Cazauran, the commissair.

"Hello, Mademoiselle Vodak, I haven't seen you for a while. How are you?"

"Thank you, all right, I think. But one never knows, especially when one is called to the police station."

"You guessed it. Why did you not register?"

"Was I supposed to?" I asked in a surprised tone.

"Don't you read the papers—the requests were printed in the Daily News thre times in a row."

"I don't read the papers—they make me sick."

Monsieur Cazauran, somewhat amused, took out of his drawer a couple of sheets, readied his fountain pen and started with the usual questions: When and where was I born, etc. When it came to my profession, I hesitated. I couldn't admit I was a teacher. I have no permit to work.

"No profession," I said reluctantly, Monsieur Cazauran looked up and seemed to do some thinking.

"How do you manage to live?"

"Well, I have some savings," I answered hastily.

"That's good, can you tell me approximately the amount you dispose of?" The dreaded question made me cautious.

"Oh, about hundred to two hundred Francs."

"Hmm ... that's not much." Shuffling the sheets, he stared alternately at me and back to the papers, then finally grinned, apparently relieved and filled the appropriate column "Rentier."

Getting up from his chair, he patted me on my shoulder and, accompanying to the door, reminded me to register with the Kommandatur.

"You might get into trouble if you don't," he warned.

April 30, 1941

The other day, before going to the Kommandatur, I paid a visit to the Oplers, the old couple from Leipzig. I had not seen them for quite some time. They seemed pleased to see me and greeted me very cordially.

"We don't go out much these days. The winds and the humidity of the past months bother us. We wondered what had become of you."

"I teach German in two schools and give private lessons which keeps me quite busy," I said apologetically. Mr. Opler interjected pensively,

"I wish I could do something constructive, instead of sitting here twiddling my thumbs and waiting for the American visa which does not arrive."

Wishing to change the conversation I said, "I understand I have to register with the Kommandatur."

"What you haven't registered with them? We were there twice already. First we registered and sometime later we received an order to present ourselves with our passports. They stamped them with a big letter "J". I hope you won't get into trouble," Mr. Opler added. "On the other hand

I remember hearing from some friends in Paris. They knew a Jewish couple from Berlin who lived in some suburb of Paris. When they received the summons to appear a certain day at a specified building in Paris—I guess it must have been the Kommandatur—they went there but stayed outside and sat on a bench to rest. While sitting there they observed many couples entering the building. After some time, only the women came out—crying. We'll come back another day, meanwhile we might find out what's happening, they said."

"They went home and let a week or two pass before returning to the Kommandatur. Inside the officer snarled at them: '<u>Now</u> you are coming? What took you so long? Do you think we will arrange a special train to send you to the concentration camp? Get out of my sight!'

"I don't have to tell you how fast they ran out and how lucky they were. A few days later, and in the nick of time, they received their visa and left for good."

"Good for them," I said. "Nowadays one doesn't hear a heart-warming story with a good ending. I have to leave now."

"Come again, it is always nice to see you."

"I shall, I promise."

The Kommandatur is in the center of town, not far away from the Oplers. It took me only a few minutes walk. I entered the building with strong misgivings. The Kommandatur is a former hotel requisitioned by the Germans. The offices are much like any other bureaucratic institution, the only difference being that instead of mousy looking civil servants there are mousy looking soldiers tripping back and forth carrying books and pads under their arms. And the soldiers are my mortal enemies!

There, behind a desk, a soldier gave me a stack of papers to fill

out. When I returned them he went carefully through each item, nodding his head from time to time. He was a short stocky fellow, the ill-fitting uniform seemed to consist of only wrinkles. He had unruly curly blond hair and gray eyes framed by a net of tiny lines which indicated a frequent tendency to laugh. Finally, he looked at me, stating in a strong Austrian accent that I was late with my registration. Then he introduced himself as Walter Sagl.

"All the compulsory registration papers of foreigners have already been sent to the headquarters and I don't know what we will do with these. But eventually, I will let you know, whether there is any penalty. For the time being, don't worry."

Getting out of his chair, he accompanied me to the door. Then, after looking around to assure himself that no one was within earshot, he quickly told me a little about himself, adding that he was lonely and glad he could converse with somebody who would understand his bitter feelings toward the Germans. He is Viennese and was an ardent member of the Social Democratic Party, formerly a strong political party in Austria, and hostile to the Third Reich.

"When they tested me on the firing range for marksmanship I closed my eyes. I could not imagine firing at the British who are my friends. Because of this I am only a lowly clerk."

I thanked him for his courtesy and hastily took my leave, not wanting to draw attention to our obviously friendly conversation. I have the feeling I shall be seeing Walter again.

May 7, 1941

Suspicion surrounds us. It is in the air. Every one is afraid of seduction—political seduction—and betrayal. The other day as I was

riding my bicycle to Biarritz on my way to Ilona's, one of my tires went flat. A military car stopped and a young man emerged, offering to help. Reluctantly, and out of necessity, I accepted.

"Allow me to introduce myself," he said formally, with a slight bow of his head. "My name is Peter Rank." I could almost detect a faint click of heels. He adeptly fixed the inner tube.

"Zdenka Vodak—Thanks." And jumping on my bike I rode off.

Two days later, while I was on the beach, he sat down next to me. At first, I did not recognize him. I was embarrassed and wanted to get rid of him, but he stuck to me like a leech.

"Please understand that I can't talk to you. I am sure you are aware of my situation," I implored him, not only being afraid of criticism by the French, but mainly because I don't want anything to do with any German.

"Where can I meet you where we can't be observed" he pleaded with me.

"Nowhere," I answered. "I am not French and it is dangerous for me." Why would he insist so strongly, I wondered. Several times in the past, I had to put in their place some officers who approached me on the beach, probably thinking I was easy prey. To avoid encounters with them I often sought out remote and less accessible beaches.

Now, what would he have to say that was so important? I looked him over. He had a beautiful tanned athletic body. He was handsome and looked intelligent with a slim, elongated head, light brown hair and very clear-blue eyes. His smile softened his Roman features, and he did not look like the typical German "Siegfried"-like hero from the Nibelungen Saga.

"I really cannot meet you any time or place and I am sure that you

wouldn't want to meet me either, if I told you that I am Czech and Jewish. At first, it seemed he hadn't heard me but after a short pause, and looking straight into my eyes, he surprised me by saying:

"Wait a moment, dear lady, you don't have to come to conclusions so quickly," and his tone sounded as if he were offended. Now it was my turn to be puzzled and curiosity took the upper hand.

"All right," I said reluctantly. "On the weekend, I will be in Guethary, about five miles from here. I have there a student whose parents own the Café-Patisserie Basque. At three o'clock, after the lesson, I shall be free and can meet you there.

The Café Basque is very popular with the Germans, being one of the very few places that serves good food to them. I suspect the owners are German sympathizers,—collaborators—and most probably receive the ingredients for the meals from the German Commando. Monique, the 24-year-old daughter of the owners is my pupil. It is of importance to the family that she learn the language of the conquerors.

I knew that we could sit outdoors at one of the tables which is hidden between hedges and rambling rose bushes and that most likely there wouldn't be any guests at a time when neither lunch nor dinner is served.

"Thank you, I will be there," and a bright smile covered his face.

It was Saturday, after the lesson, I chose a very secluded table where we would be unobserved should anybody arrive. The hedges were dense and above the particular table were branches forming a dark green canopy which offered a secluded coziness. Peter appeared a three on the dot. We exchanged a few banalities but soon I bluntly asked what was so important that he had to tell me.

"You told me you were Czech and Jewish, and I put two and two

together. Besides, I know more about you than you might guess. Anyway, I thought you would be interested to hear that very soon I am going on a special mission to Czechoslovakia. Would you want me to take some messages to somebody there and would you be interested to get some news in return? I will be happy to be the messenger."

I couldn't believe my ears, but I became suspicious. Be careful, I said to myself and to him: "No, thanks."

At that moment, Monique's brown retriever approached our table and put his paw in my lap.

"No, Flash," I patted his head, "I don't have anything for you. Get going."

"What a strange name for a dog," Peter commented.

Ignoring his remark, I could not repress a smile, as I remembered my first encounter with the dog. That day Monique had told me the dog had appeared at their door emaciated and hungry.

"He reminded us of the German soldiers who started coming to us demanding food. We served them all that was available but they insisted on 'flash', 'flash'. First, we didn't understand but later we found out it was meat they asked for. The similarity of this demand resulted in the dog's name."

"Monique," I corrected her laughingly, "the word is 'Fleisch', but I guess it doesn't make any difference to the dog."

While I was distracted by the dog, Peter had taken out a pen and drawn on the marble table top two big S's, one next to the other. My heart stopped beating and my blood drained from my head. I could not suppress a tremble of my hands.

"I am sorry Peter, I cannot talk to an SS man, I hope you understand,"

I murmured. My voice reflected distaste and emotion and I rose to my feet.

"Wait a moment," he whispered, pulling me down again. "The SS does not necessarily mean what you think and what it usually stands for here. Did you ever hear of the 'Secret Service'?" Then with the palm of his hand he erased the letters he had drawn on the marble. I was confused.

May 12, 1941

Interesting news! Rudolf Hess, one of Hitler's most important sidekicks has flown secretly to England. Nobody knows the real reason. Only mere suppositions are circulating. Did he really want to negotiate peace?

June 24, 1941

Oh là là, as the French would say. The Germans have invaded Russia. This seems to me as if they have abandoned the plan to invade Great Britain. Now the Reich has to split up its forces which will be debilitating, and Russia is a vast country.

July 20, 1941

I seem to be bumping into Peter more often than I want to. Yesterday he announced: "I'll be gone for a few days. I have to transport the only long-range cannon which is placed here for the defense of the coast. We have to test a bridge over the River Enz for its strength." When I mentioned to him that I hoped St. Jean wouldn't suffer an attack by the British while the only defense was absent, he only smiled.

Roger thanked me for that information.

August 30, 1941

Yesterday, an old German naval officer came to my apartment, inquiring about French lessons. He had heard that I was a German teacher. Rather curtly I said I did not have time.

"What a shame," he said, seeming genuinely disappointed. "I have plenty of time since I am very isolated in the outpost of Soccoa." Soccoa is a place that has intrigued me for some time. From a distance, it looks like a tower, sitting on a spit of land between St. Jean and the Spanish border. I had imagined it to be the remnant of a broken-down lighthouse, but had never bothered to ask about it.

"What on earth are you doing in such a desolate spot?"

"That's were the subs are being refuelled," he replied. Obviously he believed I was German, or he would not have related this to me. Or would he? And did he? Anyway, Roger will be delighted!

September 1, 1941

Yesterday I met Peter again. I hadn't seen him for some time.

"How was the trip?"

"Which one?"

"The one to the river Enz." He smiled a Mona Lisa-like smile.

"I equipped the train, had the cannon loaded, but when we arrived at the destination the bridge was gone. A heavy air attack had blown it to pieces."

"So we are fully protected again?" I said jokingly and it was my turn to smile.

October 1, 1941

The other day, coming home from the Oplers, I noticed helmeted, heavily armed police on every street corner checking peoples' papers. I was pedalling fast on my bicycle, lucky to pass unnoticed. In the doorway stood Walter.

"I want to tell you something that might amuse you. It is a secret I got to know accidentally." Intrigued by his presence and promising

words I said: "I hope nobody has seen you here—be quick, I don't want to be seen with you."

"Don't worry—I was careful. My curiosity was piqued.

"Tell me what happened?"

"The other day the commander of St. Malo received a telephone call from a general, telling him that two officers would shortly inspect the fortifications. Two days later they arrived in a car with all the respective insignias, iron cross and highest medals of bravery on their chests. They were outfitted with all the necessary documentation. The commander of the location showed them around. Everything took place in a normal way. They left with the expression of satisfaction with regard to the order and status of the post. The next day the commander received a thank-you note signed: "The British Secret Service."

I gasped and Walter continued.

"The same inspection ritual was repeated twice, one in St. Nazaire, the other in La Rochelle, important bases farther south. The risky enterprise enabled them to inspect these major fortifications. Finally the Wehrmacht in Bordeaux was warned to apprehend the two Secret Service men, but they did not show up and must have escaped to the Unoccupied Zone. I was told that these two phony officers typified the authentic Prussian Junkers. Their language and bearing were faultless. They seemed to be extremely well-organized and this was a well-orchestrated attack." I looked at Walter in disbelief and said laughingly,

"You are a good fairy-tale teller and it is an amusing story but incredible."

"As incredible as it seems, I swear this happened, believe it ot not."

"All right, if this is true, then it made my day, thanks." Walking up the stairs I thought of Peter. Had he been one of them?

CHAPTER FIVE

October 24, 1941

Last night I was standing at the little window of my apartment. The small smoke-filled room had made me cough. These darned Gitanes, I thought, they don't even taste good—and what is more distasteful, these had to be bought on the black market! I stood looking out on the backyard, and only seeing various dark contours of the neighborhood roofs. I could hear in the distance the klunk klunk of the measured steps of soldiers patrolling the narrow streets of St. Jean. Each time they passed it gave me a twinge, followed by a heavy jolt in my stomach. So far, they had never stopped me, asking for documentation, probably because I usually pass them on my bicycle.

I heard a soft knock at my door, and opened it to find Roger, my "pupil."

"What is it, Roger? What brings you here at this hour?" I had not seen him for some time, not since he had invited me to the Bar Basque for a glass of wine. I remembered that evening very well, because the bar was unusually empty—just two men I never had seen before, and Dr. Cazenave who was chatting at the counter with Paco, the barman. Dr. Cazenave used to be St. Jean's playboy—always flirting with American and English beauties. Of course, the beauties are now gone, but at the time it had irked me that he was too busy with the ladies and never would deem wasting a glance at me.

Roger seemed nervous and his customary applomb and cockiness were missing.

"I have to talk to you, although I feel I shouldn't burden you with things like these."

"Don't worry. You're always welcome. Sit down and relax. I can't offer you coffee, not even imitation, and the tea ration I received the other day is Argentine 'mate,' bitter as bile extract, but do help yourself to a cigarette." After he had taken his first puff, he looked at me with innocent big brown eyes—the eyes of a young, impressionable yet enthusiastic man.

"The Gestapo know I have some weapons—I don't know how they found out. Either there is a snitch in our group or somebody must have overheard my purchase deal for these guns. I must hide them but don't know where."

"Bring them to me here. I'm sure nobody will suspect that an insignifıcant language teacher would hide weapons in her modest abode."

"Oh, no, God forbid, I wouldn't burden you with such a responsibility. I might be able to conceal them in a corner of our garden."

"Does your mother know anything about these weapons—or for that matter about your underground activities?"

"Are you crazy—I wouldn't tell her anything. She would die of fear if she knew I was involved with the Maquis. Nobody knows about it, except you and Snowball."

I have never asked Roger who the contact is, feeling the less I know about details and persons the better off I am. Periodically, I have given him whatever information I have managed to obtain, without getting too involved myself. I have been lucky so far. Apparently nobody suspects people living in the South of France to understand German. The Nazis often

discuss military matters in the fully packed trains, in the cafés, or on the beach. Walter, the little sergeant at the Kommandatur, now brings little tidbits of information, which I have been saving to pass on to Roger.

I told Roger about Walter and gave him the last information he had picked up. He thanked me, looked at the clock, and saying "Nine o'clock curfew," quickly took his leave.

October, 28, 1941

It has been a couple of days since I have seen Roger, so yesterday I decided to pay a visit to his mother. At first, she didn't want to let me in. I explained to her who I was, and she burst into tears.

"Those horrible Germans! They took my boy away, didn't give me any explanations, and I don't know where he is."

I tried to comfort her but was not very successful, since she suspected the worst. I wonder where the Germans have taken him. Did he hide the weapons? Did they find them? Good God! What next?

December 9, 1941

My nightmare began a little over a month ago, on a day—October 29—that was to have been a light-hearted, happy occasion. I had been getting ready for a visit to Biarritz, where Ilona was expecting me. We had planned to cook a goat stew in her hotel room on her hot plate. She had bought the meat on the black market and only hoped the strong smell would not reach the management, since it is strictly forbidden to cook in the rooms. I had not yet made up my mind whether to cycle or take the train, when the doorbell rang. I wondered who it might be since I had not heard any footsteps. I opened the door and was face to face with two men, obviously German, but dressed in civilian clothes.

"Gestapo," one said, showing his identification. They made their way to the living room and sat down, motioning me to a chair.

"Where are the weapons?" they got straight to the point.

"What weapons?" I thought I sounded innocent enough—as indeed I was.

"The weapons you have hidden."

"I don't know what you are talking about." My heart was pounding so hard I feared they could hear it.

"We overheard you talking with Roger Deglisson in the Bar Basque."

I remembered clearly and positively that we had not talked about anything that evening that could incriminate me. Consequently I was able to stay outwardly cool. They began a search of the apartment. My Journal—to which I had long ago attached a large label, Recipes—lay on a shelf in the kitchen. I prayed they would not open it. To keep from sounding worried, I decided to sound impatient.

"Would you please hurry up—I have to go to Biarritz."

"You will be going, don't worry. Pack your things. You will be going with us."

"Where to?" Suspicion and fear began to rise in me.

"To prison."

I sat stunned, unable to speak or move.

"Get going. It's getting late."

"I don't know what to pack—what does one wear in prison?" They did not waste words.

"Warm clothes, night gear and toiletries."

I was not allowed to inform the landlord of our destination. Downstairs was a private car—a sedan. The ten-kilometer drive took only

a short time, and passed in complete silence except for one brief exchange.

"What were you doing at the house of Deglisson's mother?"

So that's why I had been picked up. The house had been under surveillance, and I had, quite innocently, walked into the trap.

"Roger is my student," I managed to say firmly, "and he hadn't shown up for class. I wondered what had happened to him—whether he was ill."

There was no response, and we rode the rest of the way in silence.

In an unfamiliar section of Biarritz the car entered a courtyard surrounded by a high wall. The large building, partially hidden from the street by trees, was a former hotel, requisitioned by the military. Now it was a German military prison—the "Maison Blanche." The two Gestapo men entrusted me to a soldier who led me up a circular staircase and through long hallways, past a few soldiers standing idly around. Finally he stopped, opened a door, and motioned me in. Inside were three iron cots, covered by thin mattresses and horsehair blankets, with stiff bolsters for pillows. Also a small chair and table. To my left I glimpsed a small alcove with washbowl and toilet. The door closed and I was alone. The tension I had managed to bottle up gave way to an outburst of tears.

After a while the door opened and a short, middle-aged soldier entered.

"I am Lieutenant Graupner, in charge of the prison." Seeing my swollen eyes he added softly: "In private I am a clergyman. Don't be frightened—here nothing can happen to you." His face was criss-crossed with spider-like wrinkles, and his small blue eyes were overshadowed by bushy brows. His smile was friendly. The gray-green uniform did not seem to fit him, looking as if it had been made for a larger person.

"For the time being you will be alone. Your food will be brought in here. If you want to read some French books, here is a list of our stock and you may check off the ones you wish, then give the list to the guard outside. Before breakfast you will have to clean your room—the guard will leave the broom at the door. The soldiers, of course, speak only German and they are prohibited to ask what you are in for. There is no heating here but if you are cold you may use the blankets from the beds and wrap them around you. Lights are turned off at nine o'clock in the evening and your door will be locked too. I'll be back to see you again tomorrow." With these words he left me.

His soft voice had a soothing effect on me and I stopped shaking. The trembling must be from the cold, I thought, collecting a couple of blankets and wrapping myself into them. I did not know what to expect, my thoughts in turmoil and feeling completely exhausted. There was nothing I could do. I was unable to follow a straight conjecture.

Suddenly the door opened. A soldier looked in and asked me to follow him. I was led to a room at the other end of the hallway. Inside were the same two Gestapo men who started again to interrogate me. I lost sense of time, feeling immensely tired. I insisted on my innocence, denying any knowledge of weapons until the two men finally gave up and sent me back to my room.

A soldier brought a bowl with cabbage, some potato chunks buried underneath and a roll of white bread. Although I hadn't seen cabbage for some time I couldn't eat. Later the soldier returned, collected the tray, but left behind the roll. I went to bed, covered myself with all available blankets and stared at the ceiling. Shadows danced a devil's dance everywhere I looked and finally I dozed off into a fitful sleep filled

with nightmares.

At daybreak, somebody knocked hard at the door, yelling: "Here is a broom, hurry up." It took me some time to realize where I was. Slowly, everything came back to me and I got dressed. I was worried, but my mind was made up not to succumb to adversity. I grabbed the broom and swept the floor conscientiously. A short time after, a tray with black coffee and a roll was shoved into my room. I drank the coffee which had a strange flavor. God knows, what this mud is supposed to be, I thought while gulping it down. I sat down and was thumbing through the booklist when the door opened and a soldier entered.

"Do you smoke, Miss?", he held a pack of cigarettes under my nose.

"Thank you," I rewarded him with a smile. He struck a match for me, and with an inviting gesture offered me the whole pack.

"Thanks again, but I don't want to deprive you, I am sure you too are rationed."

"Oh, I have enough, don't worry. I can even bring you some chocolate."

"That sounds great—I haven't had any for ages. If only it were not so cold here. I am freezing."

"Yes, I understand, but there is no heating. God only knows why the French don't build better facilities. If you might keep your door open, my little electric heater distributes some heat in the hallway, and you might benefit from it." I gratefully accepted, and he left the door ajar. As soon as he had disappeared down the hallway, I heard the shuffle of many feet approaching. Looking out I saw about a dozen men, dressed in civilian clothes, pass my door and go down the stairs. I thought I recognized Roger. The excitement made me forget my own misery for the moment, and anxiously I awaited what I hoped would be their return. After half an hour I again

heard the men's voices and their slow, heavy walk. I rushed to the door and as Roger passed—for it was indeed he—our eyes met.

Later, when the guard brought me several books, I asked him about the men. "Oh, yes, these are the male prisoners, housed on the third floor—on the second one are the women, but at present you are the only female prisoner. The men are taken down into the yard for exercise every day. By the way, your time to go down is scheduled for later."

The yard was a very unattractive square enclosure, which might have had, at earlier times, when not occupied by the Germans, shrubs and flowers, but at present there were left only a few remainders, though it was good to stretch my legs and breathe some fresh air.

Lunch consisted of a hot, watery soup with soggy bread lumps swimming in it, a roll and coffee. In the afternoon, I felt deadlocked again in one of those awful black moods of uncertainty, and when Lieutenenat Graupner entered the room, he right away tried to cheer me up saying that if my conscience was clear and if I was innocent I shouldn't give in. Release would follow as soon as my innocence was established. This, of course, takes time and I should be patient. That was easy for him to say, I thought.

The second night I slept better. I was sure the coffee I received contained some kind of drug. The next morning I anxiously awaited the descent of the prisoners, and on the dot, at ten o'clock, I saw them coming down and right away I cast a furtive eye on Roger and again we exchanged glances. When the guard came to take away the coffee mug, I asked him whether he would allow me to take the rolls I had not eaten and give them to the men. "I'm sure they are hungry and will appreciate having more to eat."

"Sure," he said, "They are not in their cells right now, but when

they return from the walk you may go upstairs and give them the bread." His leniency surprised me.

I waited for them and followed them upstairs. Roger stopped in front of his door and took the rolls from my hands. Quickly I told him what had happened. Carefully looking around, he hastily whispered:

"They found the weapons. I know I'm lost, but you are clear. Stay strong—deny everything! You were my teacher, I was your pupil, that is all. When you get home, approach Dr. Cazenave. He was my connection."

He grabbed the rolls, whispered 'good luck,' and entered the cell.

Dr. Cazenave! All of a sudden I realized what a complicated as well as dangerous world this had become. People you instinctively distrusted turned out to be courageous allies; people you liked and trusted could be agents or informers—or inadvertently lead you into peril. In either case, associating with them was dangerous. How was one to make one's way through such a world? I answered my own question: "very carefully, that's how."

I could not sleep that night for thinking of Roger. I had never before in my life felt so helpless.

One day after another went by in the same monotonous routine, interrupted only once in a while by more interrogation. The grim, unsmiling faces of several Gestapo men bore into me, but I insisted on my innocence. They no longer unnerved me. The visits by Lieutenant Graupner were meant to be uplifting. I had the impression that he was not altogether on the side of the Gestapo. He was kind and in our conversation I felt he did not see eye to eye with them.

One day, Graupner allowed me to warm up in his office. It was a comfortable nicely furnished room and I let my hands slide gently over the soft corner of the armchair, giving me a rare feeling of luxury. Sitting

down in it I saw a radio on the sideboard. On a sudden impulse I switched it on and quickly turned the knob to the BBC—the news! Unfortunately, not good—the Germans were still advancing in Russia and the Luftwaffe was still bombing London heavily. Nevertheless, I thought, I would give my shirt to be there—anything is better than to be a prisoner of the Germans.

When Graupner returned from his round of inspection I asked him if he had heard anything about my release.

"No, nothing yet," he said, and reaching out for a jar of honey which stood next to the radio, offered it to me. "Have this, it is delicious."

"No, thanks," I stuttered in embarrassment, thinking of the forbidden radio broadcast I had listened to, only moments before. He put back the jar and immediately I regretted not having accepted it.

"I have to leave for a few days. I am going back to Germany and while I am gone, Corporal Lukas will be substituting for me," he announced. "Don't worry, I'll be back. It's only a matter of a few days, while I attend a short administrative meeting."

The next day, on his rounds, Corporal Lukas came into my room and the first thing he objected to was the open door.

"It is against the rules," he said. He was heavy-set, blond, and looked like an unbaked breakfast roll. On the second day, he seemed inclined to talk to me. I had been reading one of my French books, and since there was no other chair in the room, he unceremoniously sat next to me on my cot.

"How long have you been in here?" he asked.

"A little over a month."

"You are Czech, I hear. You know, I have never been to Czechoslovakia, but I am told it is a beautiful country. After we have won the war, I plan to see Prague. Once I visited Hungary—Budapest, another city worth seeing, and the Hungarian ladies are pretty too." He sighed, and put on a comic grin to let me know he considered himself a ladies' man. After having told a few old Hungarian jokes he left, saying he would try to find out whether I would be dismissed soon.

I disliked him intensely, and was glad when I could again pick up my book. After dinner, I enjoyed a piece of chocolate and a cigarette, which one of the guards had brought, and read until the lights were cut off. My thoughts then turned to St. Jean, and I wondered whether anybody there had tried to find out my whereabouts. Surely Ilona must have inquired. But I was almost sure I was being kept incommunicado, and it was unlikely anyone knew where I was. I thought about Milan, Aunt Mathilda and Grandmother and was glad they didn't know where I was.

I tossed and turned under the itchy blanket, until finally drowsiness overcame me and I fell into a heavy sleep, jagged with nightmares. Suddenly, I woke up with a jolt. The room was in a semi-darkness, some light from the hallway filtering through the transom. Dazed and through half-opened eyes I saw a man hovering over my cot.

"I bring you good news."

Good God! It was Lukas!

"You will be released soon," he said huskily.

"I don't believe it!" Bending down, he tried to kiss me.

"Let me alone," I cried, pushing him back. "I will shout for help."

"There is nobody near. I dismissed the guard."

He crouched on the cot, forcing my legs apart with his knees, and I

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When I regained consciousness I went to the washbowl and tried to scrub away every last trace of him, like lady MacBeth washing her hands. But the stain, I felt, could never be washed away.

The room was cold and almost dark. I stumbled back to the miserable cot and pulled the blanket up over my head. I was shivering violently. They have robbed me of my country, they have taken away my freedom, and now they have violated the last vestige of my autonomy. Now even my own body can no longer be called my own! -- Let them do what they will, I thought, but don't let them break your spirit.

felt his hot breath on my face as he let his heavy body down over mine.

"I will denounce you to the commander-in-chief!"

"Do so," he said coolly. "But I warn you—it will be your word against mine, and as a Jewess you don't have a chance."

As his groping hand probed me, the light from the hallway grew dimmer, then faded into black. And then nothing.

December 12, 1941

Upon leaving the prison, the first thing I did was to go to Ilona.

"Where on earth have you been?" she greeted me. "I have asked all over, but nobody had seen you."

"Sit down Ilona, and please don't get excited. I've been in the "Maison Blanche"—the military prison right here in Biarritz. Exactly one month and twelve days."

"Oh, my God, poor child, that is outrageous! I can't believe it."

I told her as calmly as I could everything that had happened—except about Dr. Cazenave. I trust Ilona completely, yet I felt this was one thing I was honor-bound to keep secret. When I came to the part about Lukas I choked up a bit and said: "Ilona, he raped me."

She gasped.

"Please don't ask me for details. I passed out."

"So. Now you will never know, will you, whether you enjoyed it or not."

I laughed hollowly.

"Here," she said. "Have some hot soup." Ilona's face was grim. "And if—after we have beaten the Nazis' faces into the dirt—you should ever see this Lukas again, I shall help you pull out his toenails, one by one.

I shuddered. How dehumanized we have all become, I thought. And yet, I don't really believe that. The tortured gallows humor is just a front, a way of coping. And Ilona is one of the kindest, truest people I have ever known.

"Come, Zdenka, stop dawdling. Drink your soup."

"Yes Mama," I mocked, and took a sip.

Ilona sat down at the table. I thought, in spite of her light manner, that she seemed particularly tense. We can read each other pretty well by now.

"Anything wrong, Ilona?"

She fixed me with a level gaze. "Your horror story has brought back to me one of my own." What she then told me I shall set down in as exact detail as I can.

Some time ago she had met a German officer in a restaurant. They were each sitting alone at adjoining tables, and he asked if he might join her. He spoke French quite acceptably and in their conversation he detected her foreign accent, and asked what her nationality was. She told him she was Hungarian. They fell into animated conversation.

He looked to be in his middle forties, tall and skinny—not at all attractive. Bremen was his hometown. He told her he traveled everywhere with his own horse, and was staying now in a beautiful requisitioned villa. The location was perfect, the house was in a wooded area, near enough to the beach where he rode daily.

She told him, in turn, about her love of music and how she missed playing the piano. Right away he mentioned that there was a grand piano in his villa and offered her the use of it. She was not sure that she wanted to accept, but the possibility of playing again tempted her and

he insisted he would love to listen. They agreed to meet the next afternoon. During the night she had some second thoughts, but it was too late to call it off.

He had appeared in his car in front of her hotel. It was only a short drive through a few streets where here and there elegant villas appeared half-hidden behind old trees. He turned into a driveway of a two-story mansion. Everything was peaceful and quiet, as it was early afternoon when most people rest after lunch. The silence was almost oppressive, but as soon as she saw the concert grand surrounded by tasteful, solid armchairs in such a distiniguished atmosphere she forgot all her inhibitions, sat down and started to play. She felt transported playing Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata.

He had listened to her playing, sitting in one of the armchairs, while she was completely oblivious of his presence. She was carried away and infinitely happy with her music. Finally, she had slowly got off her stool and looked at him, expecting him to show some appreciation, waiting for some words of thanks. But instead she saw a man, pale and apparently distraught, his face distorted. Suddenly he grasped her hand and dragged her up the staircase leading to the bedrooms. She could not get out of his iron hold. He threw her on a bed and reached for a leather whip leaning in one corner of the room. He clamped her wrists with strong hands and forced her on to the bed. She warned him that she would yell for help, but he admitted he had sent every one away so she may shout as much as she wanted. With one hand he grasped the whip and with the other tried to pull up her skirt. Gathering all her strength, she gave him a vicious and deadly accurate kick in the groin.

He fell backward with an ear-piercing cry, writhing in pain. She

jumped up quickly and ran downstairs, out of the house and down the driveway until, stumbling through the shrubbery, she had come upon a public park where children were playing.

"I have wished ever since," Ilona concluded softly, "that this entire world could be made up only of children. Instead, their innocence will be betrayed, too, by wickedness, and some of them will in turn grow up to be wicked, and betray other innocents—and so it will go, on and on. And the world will go on being a terrible, frightening place."

December 14, 1941

Since my return home, I have had a lot of explaining to do. The landlord, the director at the school, my private students. But all, especially Joanne, are glad to see me back.

"It really is a miracle that they let you go," Joanne said, embracing me. I was surprised to see how remarkably Joanne's aquiline features softened when she kissed me.

"I searched everywhere for you," she explained. "Nobody knew where you had disappeared and everybody was afraid to investigate. Nowadays it is dangerous to get involved."

After a good many minutes of silence, Joanne turned the conversation to the latest news.

"Do you know that the United States have entered the war? The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor—a most horrible affair."

"Oh, no! Since my return I haven't listened to the radio nor read any papers. What a surprise! Does this mean we will get help from them on the European front?"

"For the time being they are kept busy in the Pacific, but sooner or later, I am sure, they will send troops to help with an offensive here.

And that will be the end of the 'Thousand Year Reich.'"

December 18, 1941

I visited the Oplers. Their vital spark is broken. They sat around their table wrapped in many layers of clothing, still freezing. Hot water was continuously running into the bathtub, the only means to warm their room.

They had another summons to the Kommandatur, and must now wear the Star of David sewn on their sleeves, which of course cost them a few points from their cloth ration.

I left them with a sad feeling. The hopelessness of their situation is heartbreaking.

Joanne has helped me get over my past experiences that tormented me. Our friendship has brought us closer together. After work we meet either in my place or hers, or when the weather permits we go for long walks.

Joanne lives in a small rented apartment which is part of her friends' house. The Lupins are caretakers of the mansion belonging to some aristocrats. In previous years she had spent her vacations with the Lupins, and after the fall of Paris she decided to stay with them.

December 19, 1941

My morale has improved but physically I feel miserable. I have rashes over my body. First, they started on my wrists and gradually tiny red spots spread over my whole body. The doctor suspects a liver ailment, the result of the poor prison food. He prescribed some medication which did not help and only upset my stomach.

The other day, one of my young students missed class although she

is usually punctual and conscientious. I bumped into her father who told me Odile had an itchy rash on her wrist. When he saw it he sent her to the pharmacy to get a salve. Under the microscope they saw tiny mites under the skin and called them "scabies." The pharmacist told her not to worry. One can easily catch them—even through a handshake.

I was dumfounded. No wonder I had got infected in prison. The horse-hair blankets must have been the culprits. The pharmacist confirmed my suspicion and sold me a jar of a gray-colored ointment containing mercury. Each application was torture. The contact of the salve with the open flesh felt like fire.

I am clean again!

December 24, 1941

Christmas is here! Joanne has left for Paris to be a few days with her mother. School is in recess and my private students are busy with preparations for the holidays. The weather is not good enough to walk to the beach or in the surrounding hills. I went to Biarritz to see Ilona.

"Christmas gets into your bones," she said with a sad smile.

I try to overcome sudden rushes of homesickness. Everything always seems worse during the Christmas season. I no longer venture out after dark, since the danger of being stopped by the patrolling German police is always greater at night. I feel a paralyzing fear of being caught. Since I never have been back to the Kommandatur, I do not have the Jewish star. I dare not think what might happen if they catch me. I feel safer when riding my bicycle, since up to now the military have stopped only pedestrians in order to check their papers.

December 25, 1941

Last night, I prepared my Christmas dinner: Two slices of bread, spread with mustard. Butter is available only on the black market and is too expensive for me. But I splurged with some black tea, a Christmas gift from Mme. Basteret. I am sure that was a gift from her Spanish fiance, the Count of Figueroa, who visits her frequently. Since he has a diplomatic passport and lives in San Sebastian it is easy for him to bring over all kind of things.

The tea was strong and hot and I drank it in slow long gulps. It was not a regal meal, but no doubt better than what the poor people in the concentration camps receive.

I tried to read some chapters in a book I borrowed from Joanne, but my attention was not with it. My restless mind bothered me. To heck, what is so special about Christmas—I grumbled—I'll go to bed and sleep, sleep, sleep. But instead my thoughts went back to former Christmasses. Indeed, other people wish to firmly slam a door on the past. Not I. I was delving into it and acquiring at the same time some strength for the present.

It was in 1936 and I was with Karel. We had decided to spend that Christmas in the Austrian Alps at Mariazell, a famous little pilgrims' town, nestled in a beautiful valley. In Vienna, where we had to change train, it started to snow which put us in a gay mood. The trip took several hours and somewhere during the passage we had to change to a narrow-gauge train. A snow storm hindered the steep ascent even with the help of the two locomotives—one at the head of the train pulling and the other one at the end of the train pushing. The wind blew heavy snow drifts on to the rails. The whistling and shrieking of the railroad

locomotives seemed to compete with the unruly storm. After many efforts against the elements, the train finally gave up and with a last dying jerk was paralyzed in the middle of nowhere. At first it seemed great fun; we ate our sandwiches and drank steaming coffee with the other travelers in our compartment. But as the hours passed and the cold started to stiffen our bodies, we became impatient and restless. Outside, snow and ice had settled on the windows which were completely covered. Suddenly we felt isolated from the outside world. Cold crept into our bones. Outside, train employees rushed back and forth accomplishing nothing. Finally, one of the crew members entered our compartment.

"You will have to help shovel snow to free the wheels from the rails," he said in an authoritative voice. "In times like these, everybody has to chip in, and if you don't help, we won't let you continue the trip." It sounded to us more of a threat than a joke, and we decided to pack our belongings and finish the trek on our skis. It took us a few hours until we reached our destination, the Alpenhof Hotel in Mariazell.

The little village, better known for its famous medieval church and past miracles than for its ski facilities, half hidden under the thick layer of snow, looked like the setting for a fairy tale. Bright lights shone from ice-covered windows, heavy smoke circled out of the chimneys from houses which seemed built by a pastry chef. The freshly fallen snow on the deserted street muted our steps and the town offered us a look at an enchanted island, lost in an unknown snow-bound world. The fourteenth century church with its onion-shaped tower was located across the square from our hotel. Columns of thick icicles seemed to be holding up the roof of the hotel.

In the warm, friendly hotel we rested a while, then descended with

great expectation to the big dining room. Everything was festively decorated and in one corner stood the tall Christmas tree. Waiters in black jackets, big white napkins over forearms, stood idle, awaiting the guests, who had not yet arrived, for the train was still stuck somewhere. The waiters hovered about us, showering us with attention, and we enjoyed the exquisite service and delicious food. But we would have much preferred a lively crowd around us. In those merry days we never liked being alone.

Where is Karel tonight, I wonder. Has his life changed as much as mine has?

CHAPTER SIX

March 1, 1942

January and February were unusually cold for this area. I had a hard time to continue going to Hendaye. A few times I visited Ilona and a couple of times we even went together to concerts in Biarritz. They break the monotony of my lonely existence. Most of the audience was in uniforms, spoiling our pleasure somewhat. On a few rainy Sundays I went to the Café de Paris for my afternoon tea. During happier times I used to sit there with Miguel enjoying aperitifs and good food. Giovanni, the Italian owner, a short man with a long nose and quick movements used to amuse us with his sense of humor. Lately he seems to have undergone a complete personality change. He is anxious to display his strong patriotic feelings by woeing the German officers who fill his establishment in the evening hours.

The last time I was there, I was the only guest enjoying the comfort and warmth of the place, making my pot of tea and toast last as long as possible. The rain was pounding on the windows adding more sadness to the view on the churning waves of the ocean.

"You don't often come anymore," Giovanni remarked, "but when you do you certainly make it worth your while by sitting a long time."

I grinned at him and thought, you little collaborator, wait—your time will come!

March 5, 1942

March came in like a lion. I love to watch the pounding waves

against the stone wall alongside the town. Dark clouds chase across the sky, once in a while sending down a downpour. I write letters to Mirko, but never receive an answer. From home no news either so it is pointless to write—it even might cause trouble for them. There is no communication at all with the outside world. I read many good books in French. The food rations are getting smaller.

My hairdresser, who is Basque, taught me a few sentences in his native tongue, such as "do you have butter, or milk, cheese or ham." In return I taught him some German words. When the weather allows I cycle into the Basque countryside and try my simple questions on farmers. They usually are so delighted to hear a foreigner voicing that difficult language, they let me have for little money what I ask for. A few quiet, nice evenings are spent with Joanne and Mme. Lupin. Most of the conversation turns around procurement of food, the situation of the war and the horrible bombings of England. The news on the radio gloats over the victorious raids of the Luftwaffe.

March 7, 1942

Yesterday morning I awoke from a beautiful dream: I was walking through a meadow, coming down a steep hill covered with an array of spring flowers. Looking up to the blue sky I saw tiny white clouds that balled together into a huge eagle spanning out its wide wings. I wondered what kind of omen this might be.

The dream had put me into a good mood and while getting dressed I realized I had skipped my menstrual period twice in a row. What if .... I did not dare finish this thought. Quickly I got dressed and could not get to the Lupins fast enough. Mme. Lupin, a heavy set, motherly woman was sitting at the round kitchen table a big pot of steaming black

imitation coffee and several slices of dry toast in front of her.

"Have some," she invited me. "Child, what brings you here at such an early hour?"

"I would like to see a gynecologist. Could you recommend one?"

"Sure dear. There is one here in St. Jean, but there is a better one in Bayonne, my daughters liked him. Let me check the address book." When she came back she handed me a slip of paper with the name of Dr. Ramon Mahieu, Rue St. Jaque.

I left right away and pedalled to Bayonne, twenty kilometers away from St. Jean. The road is very hilly and tiring. A few times, when the hills were too steep, I had to push the bicycle. I went directly to Dr. Mahieu's office. There was nobody in the waiting room and the doctor motioned me to come in. He made me lie down on the high table and examined me silently. From time to time he shook his head as if confirming his findings. Finally he patted my shoulder and said:

"Madame Vodak, may I congratulate you—you are pregnant."

I felt numb.

"Dr. Mahieu, I cannot have that baby, I cannot afford a child and I don't want it," I said emotionlessly.

Dr. Mahieu's friendly smile and shallow benevolence promptly changed into a very businesslike manner.

"I am sorry, but you should have thought about this earlier. You are old enough to be responsible for your actions."

"Dr. Mahieu, I'm willing to have an abortion and certainly would pay for it."

"Impossible, young lady. We are now strictly controlled by the Germans and I wouldn't dare perform this kind of operation. I doubt you

will find another doctor who would take such a risk. Do you know what a long prison term would mean to a physician? Now, go quietly home and have your baby." With these words he opened the door and gently pushed me out.

That was it! Pregnant! Come hell or high waters I have to get rid of the damned seed in my body, even at the cost of my own life. I never could love an unwanted child. It would be the eternal reminder of a happening I wish to forget. Moreover, I could not live in this community where I am known as a single woman. I would lose my jobs and it would mean my ruin. Thoughts like these were in my mind while returning home. They made me oblivious to my fatigue and I pedalled with unleashed fury back to St. Jean.

March 15, 1942

I tried all I could to induce a miscarriage. No stone should be left unturned, I thought. I took steaming hot foot-baths saturated with all kind of herbs, until my feet showed signs of burns. I took quinine pills. The noise they caused in my ears became unbearable and I had to stop. The giddiness I felt made me dangerously unsteady. I remembered a novel I had once read in which a woman jumped from high places to induce a miscarriage. I jumped from the table top with no results. I cycled over steep roads, returning totally worn out. I exhausted all possibilities without any result.

March 17, 1942

The other day I met Joanne. In the last months we have become good friends. I confided in her, knowing she never would betray my confidence. Joanne's first reaction was that of disbelief, followed by deepfelt compassion.

"How awful," she exclaimed. "I'd like to lynch that animal." After a short pause she added: "It does not help to cry. Something has to be done fast. Let me think for a while, but meanwhile do not panic. Try to relax."

A few days went by. I had a hard time to concentrate, yet I did not want anybody to suspect my condition. My well-orchestrated life, where monotony was hardly ever broken, was shattered. To release my tension I still walked to the beaches, climbed the rocks and watched the vast blue expanse of the ever-moving ocean.

On one of the walks I felt the air with its salty tang filling my expanding lungs. I realized how healthy and strong I was and it sent me into rages. I screamed at the wind. I watched the birds—great herons flapped past, their legs dangling in flight. It did not matter to the birds, to the waves and clouds, that there was a woman walking, a woman with a life-threatening problem. To be able to escape with them, wouldn't that be a solution?

March 24, 1942

After one of my aimless wanderings, Joanne was waiting at my door.

"I hope you didn't think I had forgotten you."

"To tell the truth, I didn't think of anything."

"Now, listen to me, don't make yourself sick. Besides, I have a suggestion. I wrote a letter to my good friend in Paris, and then, of course, I had to wait for an answer. In the sixteenth arrondissement in Paris there is a man—she thinks he is a retired physician—who used to perform curetages. She is not sure whether he is still there, but she gave me his last address. I would advise you go immediately to Paris. Perhaps your friends there also might be able to help. In any case, Paris now is the only place where you can hope to find help, and the sooner the better."

I agreed. Right away I informed my pupils that I had to leave for Paris for an undetermined time, but promised to return. I packed a few clothes and my few savings.

Joanne accompanied me to the train, kissed me goodbye and holding my head in her hands she said with a determined voice: "It will be alright, dont worry and don't be scared. Good luck! I'll see you soon."

April 20, 1942

In Paris I called Michelle immediately from the station. The short distance on the Metro didn't take long and soon we were in each others' arms.

We had some malt-coffee and I told all that had happened to me. From time to time she expressed horror, jumping up from the chair and shaking her head in disbelief. When I finished, she sat down again in complete silence. Finally she asked me what I was going to do.

"That's why I am here. I have to find a doctor who is willing to perform an abortion."

"I understand and I don't blame you."

"You have a family doctor, haven't you." You could ask him and if he is not willing, he might suggest somebody else. After all, before the war it was common practice."

"Let's wait until papa and mama come home and then we can discuss the matter properly."

While waiting, I asked Michelle about the people who lived in the neighborhood.

"Oh, it's quiet here, most moved into the suburbs at the time of the German invasion. Some died. The Rothchilds—you remember the Rothchilds—have disappeared. I suppose they were Jewish. I hope they

managed to get away."

"What a pleasant surprise," Mama Arbide exclaimed, kissing me on both cheeks. "What brings you here unannounced? You don't look too well and must have lost a few pounds. Of course, it is no wonder with the scarcity of food."

It does not seem so scarce here, I thought, looking at the full shopping bag which Mama Arbide had emptied on the kitchen counter.

It was late in the evening, after Papa Arbide had retired to the bedroom, when Michelle explained to her mother the reason for my visit. She listened and was horrified but refused to talk to their family doctor. Michelle pushed me aside and whispered: "Don't worry, I'll try to contact him tomorrow and find out whether he can do it, or at least whether he can recommend a colleague."

Indeed he refused to help. It was too dangerous and the fear of the Germans too great. No-one would risk the danger. Since the German occupation an abortion was considered a crime and retribution was accordingly severe. Michelle was frantic, but I decided to follow up the address Joanne had given me.

Coming out from the Metro station, I walked through narrow streets in a rather poor neighborhood. This must be the ugly side of Paris, I thought. The façades of the houses were in dire need of repair and fresh paint. The house I entered had a dark vestibule, no concierge and no elevator. The musty smell was almost suffocating. The stairs were half broken and rickety. The shabbiness was depressing. On the third floor I rang the bell and after a while heard the approach of tired shuffling feet. An old woman asked through the door what I wanted. I called my name and

asked to see Dr. Feuiller. The door opened and I stepped into a dark hall. My eyes needed a few moments to adjust while the woman led me to a small murky study where a man sat at a desk covered with books and papers. The man's white unkempt hair contrasted sharply with his bushy, black eyebrows, lending him a devilish aspect. He stared at me with piercing dark eyes and invited me to sit down on a small wooden chair. The dim light and his strange appearance made me even more nervous. With few words I explained what I wanted. He did not hesitate long and gave me a few instructions.

"You'd better move to a hotel nearby. Come here tomorrow morning and bring four hundred Francs. I will perform a curetage." That was all.

I quickly glanced around the room and saw an old-fashioned operating chair in one corner. The visual impact alone was enough to set my teeth on edge, but here I was an determined to go through with it.

Around the corner I found a room in a small hotel, returned to the Arbides', reported to Michelle what had happened, packed my things, left my address with them and returned to the hotel. I went early to bed but could not sleep. I could hear the elevator going up and down and the water running in the bathrooms next to my room. The pipes made a choking noise each time somebody turned on the water-tap.

The next day, Dr. Feuiller performed the surgery. It was painful. To counter the pain I gritted my teeth and clenched my fists. I do not know how long it took, but it seemed an eternity. Getting back on my feet, the doctor gave me a few instructions.

"Rest as much as you can and as soon as cramps set in and you notice some bleeding, pull the string which is attached to a rod and pull it out completely."

I returned to my hotel room, glad to be out of the gloomy place

and with the operation behind me. I spent a restless day and night in bed, yet nothing happened. Finally, I went out for a short time to find something to eat, although I was hardly hungry. In a small bistro I had some soup which I had to force down. Back in the hotel, I read the book I had brought along.

Why did it take so long? Shouldn't the bleeding have started? Was something wrong? I became impatient and irritated. What if the whole thing does not work. What was I to do? Return to that man? Turning out the lights I became terrified. The night seemed endless. But finally I fell into a restless sleep, interrupted frequently by outside noises but mainly by my own nervous state of mind. At daybreak I woke suddenly, seized by convulsive cramps. Ah, here they are, I thought with relief. My whole body was shaken by irregular jolts. Giving birth must be similar to these cramps, I thought. At that moment I remembered the doctor's instructions and started to pull the short string. It would not budge. I pulled again and again. Nothing happened. A final desperate pull and the string came off, but the stick remained inside. I started to bleed, a stream of blood running down my legs. I tried in vain to stop it with towels. The cramps weakened me. The gray of dawn filled the room. I did not know what time it was when I decided to go back to the doctor. The shooting pains became even more intense. I wanted to get out of bed and my head started to turn ....

When I woke up I was in a comfortable bed, my head spun and I was confused. Blinking through a thin veil I perceived a figure at my bedside, dressed in white. Her head was surrounded by a wide wimple. At first I thought I was in heaven. The figure became clearer and I realized she was

a nun. Nuns are on earth and I am still alive, I thought, wondering whether to be glad about it or not. A smell of soap and disinfectant tickled my nose.

"You kept us worried. We were not sure you would pull through," the nun said sternly. "You don't know how lucky you are. They found you on the floor, covered with blood, and rushed you by ambulance to Sainte Marie. Your septicemia was quite advanced. Now be a good girl and drink your coffee and I'll be back soon."

It took me some time to realize what had happened. Still in a daze I sipped the coffee sweetened with real sugar. Trying hard to remember the order of events of the past twenty-four hours, I decided I didn't want to know. I knew I was alive and relieved from the burden of an unwanted pregnancy. The rest did not matter. I fell into a long, sweet slumber.

A series of heavy cramps, shooting through my body, woke me up. It was late in the afternoon. A young nun at the nighttable next to my bed gave me some pills with a glass of water.

I obediently swallowed the pills while she pulled up a chair and sat down next to my bed. Smiling, she held my hand until I fell asleep.

The next morning, I ate a complete breakfast and slowly felt my strength returning.

"Am I going to make it?" I asked one of the sisters.

"Of course, dear, don't worry—everything will be fine. But you might thank the good doctor who saved your life. It would be interesting to know how you got into this condition, but if you don't want to talk about it, that's perfectly understandable."

"If you don't mind, I'd rather not."

"You will be able to leave the hospital tomorrow. Do you have a

place to go?" I asked her to phone Michelle and bring my money.

That afternoon I suffered more severe pains and wondered how I would be able to leave the hospital so soon.

Michelle came the next morning, paid the bill, bundled me up and took me to the hotel next to their home, since I had refused to go to their apartment. I went straight to bed and Michelle sat beside me.

"You know, they found you on the floor in a pool of blood and they rescued you in the nick of time. The hotel maid thought you were out and went in. She thought you were dead. I was already worried since we hadn't heard from you after you left. You can't imagine how relieved I was to get Sister Marie's telephone call. But now, everything is over, thank God."

I had listened without interrupting. What was there to say? I was relieved from my worry and out of the hospital, and Michelle seemed to have guessed my thoughts. She kissed me and left me to rest.

With a sudden jolt I woke up from a heavy sleep. At first I didn't know where I was. Next door people singing, shouting, dancing, playing music, popping champagne bottles and throwing glasses against the wall. There was no way to fall asleep again. The noise lasted until dawn. I fell asleep again and woke up when Michelle appeared in the door.

"I hope you had sweet dreams," she greeted me cheerfully.

"Would you believe there are people here who have reason to celebrate? The ruckus next door lasted the whole night."

"I believe it. I forgot to tell you that your neighbor is a celebrated singer known for these kind of parties. I should have warned you but didn't think to. Will you forgive me?"

"Certainly. Besides, I got a few hours' sleep and I feel rested.

In fact I'm planning to get up and see whether I'm strong enought to take the train back to St. Jean."

"Oh, Zdenka, this would be really wonderful, although I'd hate to lose you so soon. Can't you stay a few more days?"

"I would love to, but I must return to work; my students are waiting for me and besides I can't afford to lose more pay."

"I understand, but don't you think it is too soon for you to travel?"

"Perhaps, but I must try."

Michelle left and when I was alone I took a few steps and was surprised how easy it was. Encouraged, I packed my few belongings and walked to the Metro. I decided I could not leave Paris without revisiting the Arc de Triomphe. I got out at the Champs Elysées and was surprised to see the changes. But it was more the mood than anything else. The houses were the same, the tree-lined avenue was the same, but stores and cafés were different, some were closed and others struck me with their bleakness. There was an agony in the air of Paris. The houses seemed austere and gray. The café-terraces which before the war were brimming and buzzing at all hours with people of all nationalities were now half-empty and the grey-green color of military uniforms was out of place. Even the sound of the voices did not fit into the French picture. But the most startling sight was the Swastika fluttering in the light spring breeze over the Arc de Triomphe.

I sat down in a sidewalk café. In my memory there still resounded the lighthearted chatter of tourists. I missed the steady noise of passing cars, the incessant honking of impatient drivers and the taxi-drivers pounding against car-doors with their fists. Only a few military vehicles rumbled by, leaving behind an unpleasant smell of badly burning fuel. Dejected, I left the café and while crossing the avenue a policeman stopped me.

"You are jay-walking," he scolded me. "I will have to issue you a ticket. Rules are rules, and these are strict German orders."

"I am sorry, monsieur l'agent," I said with a feeble smile. "I don't live here anymore. I was just released from the hospital and am on the way to the train station to get home." I realized it sounded stupid, but it was the first thing that had come to my mind. The policeman looked at me and as if wanting to show some sympathy he admitted that I did not look well.

"Where do you live, mademoiselle?"

"In St. Jean de Luz—in the Basque country."

"Oh, what a coincidence, I am from the Pays Basque. My family still lives in Tarbes. Do you know that little town in the mountains?"

"I was there once when visiting Pau which is on the way to Tarbes, if I am not mistaken."

"How right you are, and it makes me homesick to think of it."

Forgotten was the infringement of the traffic rules and the ticket.

"Have a good trip, take good care of yourself and say 'hello' to the Pyrenees."

Before reaching the station, I thought I would eat something and remembered the little café "Pam Pam" across from the Opera. It used to be a favorite eating place of American tourists serving American-style sandwiches. The café was still there but food was no longer served. I left disappointed and hungry.

Arriving home exhausted, I decided I needed some more rest before resuming classes. I had overestimated my strength and felt I was not ready to meet with people. I had to be alone, to find my equilibrium and to do some soul-searching. My emotions were spent, but now I had to deal

with ghosts left over from the recent mightmarish events: I have killed a living thing within me. But had I not done it, I would have had to kill myself. There was no other way. Is that an excuse? Wouldn't any judge have acquitted me of this crime had he known the circumstances? After days and long nights of self-incrimination I decided to brush away introspective answers to my questions, stop my serious soul-searching, turn the page and live with myself.

May 15, 1942

For these past weeks time has crawled by with daily routine activities—teaching, school conferences, looking for food, visiting with Joanne and Ilona. Together we have followed the war news. The total silence from home lies heavily on my mind. There is no communication with the outside world. I still feel as if I'm living in exile and lost among the French people, who remain strangers to me. Of course, I am very fond of Joanne and Ilona, but I miss family—most of all Pavel. And Miguel—Miguel has faded into a ghost of a ghost.

June 8, 1942

The papers were full with news that especially concerned me. Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi Deputy Protector of Czechoslovakia, had ruled that country by sheer terror. A few days ago, his car was bombed and he was severely injured. Reprisals were brutal and led to the destruction of Lidice, a village in Bohemia. All its male inhabitants were shot, and its women and children transported to concentration camps. Our civilization has regressed far beyond the Middle Ages—it seems.

June 28, 1942

The other day I was listening to the BBC on my little clandestine radio, when the doorbell rang. Immediately I turned it off for fear some intruder might hear it and denounce me to the authorities. I opened the

door and there stood Mr. Opler. His ashen face showed terror and despair. Usually this old mane seemed so composed and optimistic, expecting his visa to the United States to arrive any time.

"They came to get my wife—she had to pack a small suitcase and be at the town square within one hour. I asked to go with her, she is handicapped—we have been married to each other for so long—we belong together. I begged them but they said I was over the age limit.

But I did go with her to the square where there were about thirty people assembled, whom they loaded on to a truck, like sheep. When I climbed up, they kicked me back and refused me. What am I supposed to do now?"

I looked at the poor old man, who had shrunk to a small heap of misery.

"I know somebody at the Kommandatur, and will try to find out what can be done—don't give up hope. Come now, I'll take you back to your apartment."

But next day nobody at the Kommandatur would give me information. With a heavy heart, I approached his apartment. I did not have to ring at the door. Mr. Opler stood in the doorway, and triumphantly exclaimed:

"In one hour I have to be in the square—they promised I will be reunited with my wife."

I helped him pack the few belongings, wondering what fate was awaiting him. Why didn't they transport the old couple together? Where are they taking the people? Rumor had it that they sent them to concentration camps.

I offered to go with him to the town square, but he said he would rather go alone. Waving goodbye, he walked down the hallway, leaving the

door to his apartment ajar. Inside I could see the Oplers' packed suitcases, neatly stacked in a corner, ready to be shipped to the promised land—America. For a moment I stared at the open door of the closet, where a few clothes were left hanging. I felt a sudden cold draft coming through the hallway, then the door to the staircase shut with a bang.

July 3, 1942

This morning, as I was pumping air into my bicycle tires and about to set out for Biarritz, a tall heavy-set man appeared at my side, introducing himself as Monsieur Lafitte. I had seen him occasionally before, the owner of one of the town's most important general stores.

"What can I do for you, Monsieur Lafitte?" I asked with genuine surprise, since it was the first time a local citizen of such assumed importance had sought me out.

"You are Mademoiselle Vodak, are you not?" I nodded slightly in affirmation.

"Didn't you receive a summons from the Kommandatur the other day?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, the sergeant at the Kommandatur has sent me to make sure you appear there today at ten o'clock."

Since I never had paid attention to previous subpoenas, I wondered what it was all about, and annoyed by M. Lafitte's arrogant manner I balked.

"I'm sorry, but I cannot go with you. I have an appointment in Biarritz."

"You'd better come with me, Mademoiselle, or there will be grave consquences."

"Then tell them you did not find me at home. After all, it is not your fault."

Saying this, I jumped on my bicycle and let M. Lafitte with his mouth agape.

Ilona had a pot of aromatic but unrecognizable food, of unknown provenance, stewing on her electric burner when I arrived.

"The whole hotel smells of your cooking," I said. "One of these days they will surely throw you out. While we were eating, I told her about the episode with M. Lafitte. "I don't like it. I wonder what the Germans are brewing up. I'm getting more nervous every day. I wish I could leave. Would you come with me if I found a way to get out safely?"

"Leave for where?" Ilona sighed. "I can't leave all my things here and just run away. I don't feel I'm in any danger. I have a valid passport and the Germans have a good relationship with us Hungarians. Besides—as you know—I have an Aryan birth certificate." Privately I wondered how much longer that security would last. The Hungarians are as much prey to the Germans as the Czechs were in the past. It's only a matter of time and convenience to the Germans.

After lunch we walked together down the steep path leading to the Rocher de la Vierge. The winding walks were flanked by blue and pink hydrangeas. The air was clean and tangy with salt. We sat on the sand and watched the high tide pounding, too dangerous to swim and too hazardous to reach the Rocher de la Vierge. We said goodbye at the beach, and I arrived home just as darkness was setting in.

July 12, 1942

Very early this morning I was surprised by a knock at my door. To my astonishment, it was Walter.

"Come in, Walter. What's new at the Kommandatur and what brings you here?" I asked. I had not seen him since my imprisonment.

"They are going to get you any day now," he whispered. "You must leave immediately. They have in detail all your personal documentation, and you are on the list for deportation. They are rounding up all Jews and every day are deporting groups from this region, including St. Jean. Don't waste any time. Good luck." With that he turned and left quickly.

I was stunned. I decided I must go to Dr. Cazenave. He was the only person who might be of help.

He did not live far away and I had no trouble locating his cottage behind a dense hedge. Shortly after my knock on his door, Dr. Cazenave himself appeared. How could one possibly suspect that this elegant young man, immaculately dressed in stylish sports clothes, was a freedom fighter, very active with the maquis?

I did not waste any time. I introduced myself as Roger's friend, and told of last seeing him in prison. As I told him of my danger he listened intently.

After a moment of reflection he became very businesslike and I had the impression this was not the first time he had given these instructions.

"Tomorrow, at exactly three o'clock, there will be a Basque woman with her bicycle waiting for you at the bridge between St. Jean and Ciboure. She will not acknowledge you but will lead you to guides who will take you over the mountains into Spain. I warn you, it won't be easy, but you seem healthy and strong. Besides, one can do many things when it is a matter of life and death. As soon as you arrive in San Sebastian, go to the British Consulate and ask to be sent to England."

"Will I have to pay her, and if so, how much?"

"I don't think there is a fixed price."

"Would two hundred francs be enough? This is about all I have,

although I also have ten American dollars. Besides, I have a one Peseta note which a friend of mine gave me for good luck a long time ago."

Dr. Cazenave could not suppress a smile. He advised me that I might offer the two hundred francs to the woman, since there are usually many persons involved in guiding people out of the country. A money reward would keep the incentive alive for these people to undertake such dangerous trips.

"By all means, keep your ten American dollars. They might come in handy later, and certainly do not part willingly with your lucky Peseta."

With these words he opened the door, wished me good luck, and quickly closed the door behind me.

I pedalled home as fast as I dared without drawing attention to myself. My anxiety was mounting. I had a lot to do. I would store my belongings with the owner of the apartment, Mme. Duprez—I was sure she would agree—in the uncertain hope of sending for them after the war. I had to pay up the rent and give her something for the storage.

Then Joanne had to be told. Fortunately I caught her still at home.

"I wish I could go with you," Joanne said, kissing me, tears in her eyes. "Do you know anybody in San Sebastian?"

"No, but right now I can't think that far ahead. Besides I don't plan to stay there."

"Never mind. I once was given a name and address by some friends of mine of people who live there, and one never knows how handy an address might become." She rummaged in a drawer and finally found a small tattered address book from which she read a strange Spanish name, Felipe and Catalina Irigoyen. I wrote it on a slip of paper and hid it behind the small mirror in my purse. Then I scribbled a short note to Ilona, saying only:

Joanne will explain everything. God willing, we shall meet again.

Love, Zdenka.

"Please, give this to Ilona the next time you go to Biarritz. Explain everything to her, and my sorrow at not being able to say goodbye."

Then we parted quickly, before both of us should break down and cry.

I have no more goodbyes to make. I am leaving here my sweetest memories—some bitter ones, too. Of what I look back on now as golden days in Paris, with Pavel and Michelle, Veronika, Franta. Of heady days in St. Jean de Luz with Renata, and Johnny, and Miguel. Oh, Miguel—there is so much of you here.

Until then—farewell!

PART II

CHAPTER SEVEN

In occupied France, on this eve of Bastille Day, 1942, there was little resemblance to the usual festivities marking the fourteenth of July. The merry faces and cheerful dancing crowds were only memories now. No-one felt like celebrating, no-one wanted to mingle with the gray-green uniforms of the victors, with the steel-helmeted gendarmes who marched with heavy steps in columns through the streets. France was beaten, defeated, subservient. Two years of slavery, tyranny and terror had transformed the sunny, light-hearted vacation town of St.Jean de Luz, nestled on the French-Basque shore between Biarritz and the Spanish border, which even when it rained had shown a happy face.

Downstairs my bicycle was waiting. After one last look around, I closed the door behind me.

Half an hour down the road I reached the designated bridge. Off to the side was a woman in peasant clothes who seemed to be fussing with her bicycle. As I approached she picked up her bicycle and entered the road just slightly ahead of me. We rode this way for several miles, as if totally unaware of each other.

The tranquility surrounding me was in sharp contrast to my feelings. Grazing cows, well fed and lazy, stared into space, not even turning their heads for two passing cyclists. No sound disturbed the summer day that was coming to an end.

The terrain became more difficult. Rocks and boulders forced us to

dismount and push our bicycles. We reached a farm, and the Spanish woman tried to explain something to me. I did not understand, but gathered from her gestures that I was to abandon my bicycle, my beloved vehicle and faithful comrade which had carried me so often through the beautiful Basque hills. I realized I had to leave it behind as I reached the end of an epoch in my life, stormy at times and difficult, but never before life-threatening. Here began a new world, unknown and frightening. The fast decision of this daring venture had filled me with agony, yet there was no other choice if I was to escape almost certain death. The unknown danger of this enterprise seemed preferable to what I could expect as an inmate of a Nazi concentration camp.

We reached a farm house and entered a simple rustic room in which were three persons; one a woman at a stove, the others an old man and a young one. I took them for a family. My Spanish companion introduced us, then took her leave. The woman turned to me with some question, but I only gestured, showing that I did not understand, whereupon the young man tried to interpret her words, only to learn that I was unable to understand his flood of Spanish words. To end any doubts, the woman placed in front of me a plate of delicisouly smelling ham with eggs, a chunk of bread and a glass of wine, and invited me to eat with an unmistakable movement of her hands. I began gladly.

Darkness fell and it was time to leave. I thanked them with a shy "merci" and bade the couple goodbye. The young man reached for my little suitcase and we were joined by another young man outside the house who thrust a walking stick into my hand. Both boys gave me to understand that they were my guides and that I should follow them in complete silence at a distance of a few feet.

First we cut through a field, then up a steep trail at quick tempo. I struggled to keep pace, my eyes glued to the trail, my only thought to succeed.

After climbing for a long while, my peace of mind began to return. The silence of the evening soothed my nerves, and I dared to look about me. The scene was breathtakingly beautiful, the sharp treeles skyline of the Pyrenees silhouetted against the sky which fell down softly to the shore of the ocean. The distant water reflected the last colors of the sunset while the meadows and fields were already in darkness and the quiet night spread its wings over sleeping nature.

The trail became steeper and almost impassable. We turned away from the path and crossed a ravine densely covered with high fern. My first impression was that we advanced haphazardly but soon I realized we were walking a hardly noticeable path, known only to trained eyes, hidden under fern, broom and underbrush. "The Smugglers' Trail!" I wondered how many smugglers over the centuries had tranported their wares, how many political fugitives might have carried their last hopes to the other side, and how much blood might have run over the rocks and grass, caused by a bullet from a watchful border patrolman.

My guides whispered together and one of them promptly disappeared soundlessly. The other stayed with me and we stopped and waited. There were no stars in the sky and no moon, a helpful hand in my flight. In the distant town of Irun, on the Spanish side of the border, the lights were twinkling. I had not seen nightlights in the past two years of war and in that instant they seemed to me like dear old friends from the past.

The air had cooled and the dew had settled on the grass—I felt the humidity through my thin sandals. Suddenly a soft bird's trill sounded

through the still night. My guide gave me the signal to continue our march. After some brisk walking, we reached the other Basque who apparently had given the signal after surveying the terrain and finding it safe. The path continued to climb higher and higher and the birdcall procedure was repeated several times. The sky which had been clear was now covered with clouds, I figured that midnight could not be far off. I followed my guide closely, almost stepping on his heels. The darkness was so intense that I could not distinguish anything, but my instinct helped me and I did not lose the path in spite of frequently tripping over rocks and low brush. Suddenly we stopped. The guide turned his head toward me and put a finger to his lips. We were close to the border, and the path, a real trail once more, covered with stones and dry dirt, led abruptly down. My tension mounted again, a diversion at least from the pain I suffered from several falls. I tried to ignore the cuts and bruises by clenching my fists.

Darkness slowly gave way to dense fog. A dog barked nearby and the vague outlines of a house appeared amidst wisps of fog, but my guides continued, unruffled.

Suddenly a man appeared out of nowhere next to me and my heart pounded. I looked at my guides, but they stopped and let the man pass. Behind him appeared another one and another with boxes on their shoulders. The shock which had almost paralyzed my limbs slowly gave way to astonishment. In complete bewilderment I could now observe approximately twenty smugglers who went by with silent steps, in regular rhythm with their heavy burdens on their shoulders. They paid no attention to us, walking with their heads down, watching only their steps. We now followed them and reached a river which wound its way between low brush that grew on the steep,

rocky banks. I realized it was the River Bidassoa which formed the border between France and Spain. Yes, indeed, on the other side was Spain—the goal of my peripatetic wandering, where I hoped to find peace and freedom.

My guides placed my suitcase in front of me and disappeared with a gesture that I should wait. With this sudden abandonment I realized the danger I was in and panic engulfed me. I recalled stories of men who, while promising to help smuggle refugees over the border, instead left them to the German patrols and their sad fates. Desolation gripped me and while contemplating whether to start running I looked around and at that moment I again saw the smugglers. They had stacked their boxes on the ground and were walking back and forth along the river bank, apparently searching for a shallow crossing. One of the men broke away and approached me in total amazement. Others joined him and I heard their low whispers: "Una mujer" (a woman). I could detect at the same time a tone of disbelief and one of admiration. Some of the men tried to talk to me but I gave them to understand that I did not speak their language.

Finally my two guides returned, having found the spot where they planned to ford the river. They talked in their hushed voices, then joined the smugglers, shouldered their heavy boxes and stepped haltingly into the water. I was rudely seized and put on the shoulder of one of the smugglers. I tried to keep my balance, grabbing him with my arms under his chin, and we began the crossing together. Step by step he proceeded with great caution as the current was strong and the water so deep that it reached his neck. My legs were dangling in the water and feeling the rising dampness and cold, I tried to separate myself from him in order to swim the short remaining distance to the other side, but his iron hands would not free me and when we reached the shore he set me down. I tried

partially to wring my cold, heavy clothes while the smugglers congregated into a different group. Suddenly I no longer knew which of them was my guide—in the darkness I did not recognize anyone. Like a confused little lamb that follows the bellwether, I followed the men.

In regular steps we climbed again. After a few attempts to fraternize with me, the men gave up and fell back into complete silence. We stopped to rest at a meadow. The leather wine bottle that every Basque shepherd carries made the rounds. Holding it at a distance from their faces, they let the stream of wine run directly into their open mouths. I politely refused the offer to join them. My throat was parched, but I knew it would mean more trouble than pleasure. A few minutes went by while the bottle made the rounds and we started to walk again. A man grabbed my arm and guided me in the opposite direction from the smugglers. Our paths separated. Now I recognized the young man as one of my guides and I followed him—the other one seemed to have disappeared.

After one more hour of climbing, I became aware of my fatigue. The damp clothes which clung to my cold body and the wet sandals made it more difficult for me to walk. My legs moved like those of an automaton and seemed detached from my mind and from the rest of my body. I was thinking longingly of a warm and comfortable bed and as if by magic there appeared in front of my eyes a farmhouse. Without hesitating, my guide knocked in a certain rhythm at the door which opened after a few minutes. I had the feeling we had been expected and we entered. Inside, a dim candlelight showed we were in a cowshed. We were met by a farmer who led us up some wooden steps. We entered a room that was at the same time kitchen, dining room, washroom, bedroom, and living quarters for a few cats, dogs, innumerable flies and cockroaches. The dirt was indescribable.

I was offered something to drink but did not dare accept. The men conversed animatedly for a few minutes while I searched for a place to rest. I caught sight of a cot in one of the corners and fell on it, exhausted, forgetting all thoughts of cleanliness and hygiene, and fell asleep instantly.

Suddenly I was being shaken. I awoke from a deep, dreamless sleep, tried to collect my thoughts and pulled my clothes into order. I had slept only two and a half hours—hardly enough to feel rested. It was 6 a.m., and shivering I looked out of a little window toward a grey sky where the first signs of light were appearing. A new day was starting yet the past one was still pulsing in my tired veins. The rancher asked me whether I was in the possession of a "cedula"—a Spanish identification which, of course, I did not have. He looked at me in bewilderment, and I could sense his irritation as he exlaimed how it was impossible to reach Irun safely without it. Now I was desperate and feared my courage would leave me. What a great disappointment! Had all the troubles and predicaments of last night been for nothing? I had thought that once in Spain, the danger of getting caught would be over, but he explained to me with words and gestures that many Spanish gendarmes accepted rewards for extraditing undocumented refugees to the German authorities. The rancher had seen several guards near the house during the night. To be sure, it was more dangerous to continue during daylight but hopefully the soldiers would be stalking their prey nearer the border. I realized I had no other choice.

The fresh mountain air instilled new strength in me, and slowly I shook off my tiredness. Our narrow path cut the ravine into two halves, the steeper upper part densely overgrown with low shrubs and wide-leaved herbs, the lower meadow a profusion of wild flowers. The whole picture

that nature presented before my eyes filled me with new courage and calm resolve, and at the instant, the sun broke through. It turned the shimmering dew into thousands of diamonds.

Our fast steps brought us to a wider but precipitous road. Luck seemed to be on our side now. Only a solitary old peasant woman, guiding a heavily loaded donkey, carrying her wares to the next town, descended the hill and paid us no attention. We abandoned the road and crossed a few backyards behind several small farmhouses huddled between trees and bushes. We had finally reached Irun, the first town on the Spanish side of the border. The guide motioned me to enter one of the houses. Inside, an old woman rushed forward with many questions for him, at the same time offering me a mug of coffee. I accepted it thankfully, swallowing with thirsty gulps. Finally I could take off my wet sandals and change to regular shoes. My guide and the woman discussed vehemently what seemed to be the safest way to reach San Sebastian. Precious minutes were slipping by and we started out again. We crossed the center of Irun where the daily routine bustle of small-town activities had just begun. After a thirty minute walk we reached a small railroad depot and my guide instructed me to follow immediately behind him as soon as the train arrived, jump up, sit down inside the compartment and ask the conductor for a ticket to Renteria. I repeated the strange sounding name a thousand times so that I could pronounce it without arousing any suspicion. The train arrived. I did as I was told, but my heart was beating heavily against my chest, and drops of perspiration ran down my forehead. I managed to ask for the ticket and when the controller left, I started to relax again. In Renteria where the train made a short stop, I jumped down right behind my guide. The train began to move again.

In that moment I saw an officer jump down from the last car. He moved towards me and suddenly we stood face to face. I was petrified and, felt my blood pulsing through my veins. He pointed toward my handbag and since I did not know what to say I opened it with shaking hands, looking straight into his eyes, as if begging for understanding, but fearing the worst, not knowing what his next move would be. He examined everything and asked from where I came, to which I responded truthfully "Irun." After all, it was not a lie.

"How long were you there?"

"One hour."

Where are you going?"

"To San Sebastian."

"This is not San Sebastian."

"I know."

After this short dialogue he gave me back my bag and walked away. I slowly looked around, but my guide was nowhere to be seen. I walked out of the station and through several streets but he had vanished, and with him my only earhtly possession—the suitcase.

I must have gone in circles, since suddenly I was again in front of the station. To my horror, the same officer reappeared, this time accompanied by another. He gestured me over and my first impulse was to run away, but instead I stood immobilized. I was sure all was lost. Again he opened my bag, showed the cosmetic flasks and tubes to his colleague, and asked me for my nationality. Almost inaudibly I whispered "Czeque," hardly able to suppress the sobs that I felt rising in my throat. Amd now a near miracle happened. The officers peeled off the lables from all the flasks, tubes and lipsticks in my bag, all carrying French labels--

apparently to prevent possible difficulties with later inspections. Tears were now rolling down my cheeks. I mumbled "gracias," and I was alone again. The unexpected generosity of the two officers left me dumbfounded but gave me renewed belief in human kindness. I left the station with quick steps, minimizing the loss of my guide and belongings. After all, freedom was smiling at me. Deep gratitude filled my heart.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Spain

July 15, 1942

Although I felt hopeful, reality reasserted itself in my mind. What to do now? Where to turn? Where was San Sebastian?

I dared not ask passersby for fear of attracting attention. Besides, I didn't know the language. I walked slowly away from the station. A few people passed carrying empty baskets, probably going to market. Two children were playing on the sidewalk. I approached them and asked in a low voice: "San Sebastian?" The children nodded, pointing their fingers towards one side of the road now drenched in sunlight.

I started off. The road was dusty and the sun hot. There was not much traffic. A few trucks passed. Tired, I timidly held up my thumb as I had seen people do in American movies. Either I was not good at hitch-hiking or trucks were not accustomed to giving rides to pedestrians—no one stopped. The sun rose higher, heating the air mercilessly. The fatigue of the sleepless night started to demoralize me. My eyes followed an old tramway alongside the road and wondered whether it ran to San Sebastian. My feet refused to carry me. My shoes were not proper walking shoes and gave me burning blisters. My wool suit was too warm, the skirt clung to my body.

Oh, God, what can I do in this foreign country, not knowing a living

soul, without money, a strange language I can't speak. What will become of me, I thought. At the end of my strength, I sat down on a broken stone wall which supported a ramp leading to a shelter. A tram stop! Tears came tumbling uncontrollably down my cheeks. I watched the hot shimmering air interrupted by clouds of dust from passing cars which from time to time triggered coughing fits. I searched in my handbag for a handkerchief but instead discovered my "good-luck" one-peseta bill. At that moment a tram approached and stopped with a screech. A broken sign with the letters San Sebastian dangled in front of the first wagon. Desperately I climbed the high steps on to the platform. The tram lurched off again. I didn't dare to go inside, but stayed on the platform. Suddenly the uniformed conductor stood before me.

With a sudden reflex I grabbed my peseta, held it up near the man's face and said haltingly: "San Sebastian?" The man nodded. Out of a grubby leather bag he removed several pads, pulled a slip from one, punched a hole in it, handed it to me, accepted the peseta and returned a few coins.

My courage returned as I went inside and sat down on a wooden bench. Bouncing left to right, when the tram took a curve, I feared we would fly loose and smash into a building. More relaxed I surveyed the surrounding countryside, simple family dwellings and warehouses slowly gave way to well-tended gardens and huge old-fashioned villas. The air felt purer. At a sudden sharp turn I could see tawny hills and sea air brushed my nostrils.

Another sharp left turn and we entered a wide double-tree-lined boulevard. The center of town, I thought, and jumped down at the next stop.

So, this was San Sebastian? And no uniforms in sight! I sighed

with relief. No Germans! Of course, this was a neutral country! While I stood waiting and watching, people passed slowly, paying no attention to me. I must look all right I thought.

I glanced at a nearby clock and saw it was almost noon. A few steps away was a huge sign "banco." I stepped in, walked to the counter, pulled out my ten-dollar bill and stuck it close to the teller's face, saying "Dollar?" Without changing his business-like expression, he replied: "Si--pasaporte?" Hearing the word pasaporte, I was out the door faster than lightning.

Church bells were ringing and I felt it was a good omen. I hadn't heard church bells since the beginning of the war. How much I missed that friendly welcoming sound.

Cautiously looking to the left and right, I pulled out of my pocketbook the address of the Irigoyens given me by Joanne. I approached a taxi whose driver was leaning idly against the open door. He looked friendly. I showed him the slip and he nodded. I asked, "dolares?"

"Si, si," he enthusiastically helped me into the cab.

We drove through clean tree-lined streets flanked by six-story houses. We passed a large Gothic cathedral, standing at the end of a square. The driver finally stopped in front of one these tall gray apartment houses, and helped me from the cab. Seeing my indecision, he went to the entrance, rang the bell and entered the house, returning with an old man and a woman of about my age. Despite the awkwardness of an encounter between strangers, their faces were friendly, and though puzzled by my presence, the old man promptly paid the driver. The woman picked up my small pouch and invited me to enter. They didn't know me yet received me with open arms. I showed them the slip with the name and address of

Joanne's friends. A smile lit up the woman's face and showing the way she walked me up the staircase to the second floor, where an older woman, dressed in black, hair coiled high on top of her head, waited at the open door with two little girls. They looked at each other but I didn't understand what they were saying and they didn't understand me. I was ushered through a long narrow corridor into a simply furnished rather bare dining room and invited to sit down.

I tried to introduce myself and the young woman, in pointing to herself Asuncion Irigoyen de Fraga, and pointing to the old couple who seemed to be her parents, Doña Catalina and Don Felipe Irigoyen. With gestures and words they explained that someone would be coming shortly who spoke French.

There appeared a middle-aged man whom they introduced as Don Antonio Garamendi. I outlined my adventures while Don Antonio translated for the attentive listeners. At first they seemed stunned into silence, then, suddenly, as if by a command, they talked excitedly all at the same time. As soon as they had calmed down, I told Don Antonio of my plan to go directly to the British Consulate, but the consternation on their faces made me waver.

"What is wrong?" I asked Don Antonio.

"I don't doubt that the Consulate would be willing to help, but unfortunately there is no way for you to get near there. The entrance is guarded by policemen, who demand to see papers from every person who enters. We wouldn't advise you even to try."

When Antonio saw my dismay, he added: "Don't lose your courage; for the time you are safe here and later on we shall see what can be done. The Irigoyens are willing to give you shelter, though I might add they

put themselves into a dangerous situation. They are known to be politically against Franco and they risk imprisonment if the authorities discover they are harboring a refugee."

They could see on my face the effect of Antonio's explanation. My mind was in turmoil. The fact that I could bring danger upon this kind family filled me with horror, yet the people did not appear to give it a second thought. They asked Antonio to let me know that lunch would be served soon and, for the time being, I put aside these distressful worries. Asuncion led me to a bedroom and shortly after brought in towels and a bucket of warm water, which she deposited next to the washbasin. No sooner had I washed than I realized how hungry I was.

When I returned to the dining room I was greeted by additional people. Doña Carmen, wife of Antonio, was a traditional Spanish beauty, white skinned with full red lips, whose glistening, long black hair, parted in the center and tied to a knot in her nape, contrasted strangely with her blue eyes. They reminded me of the spring violets I used to pick in the woods of my hometown. Carmen, heavy set, towered over Antonio. Looking at her face, you forgot to look at the rest of her. Their teenage daughter Mercedes, a green-eyed, olive-skinned beauty, sat between them. Doña Carmen spoke perfect French with a slight accent. More fluent than Antonio, she took over the conversation, telling of how they had grown up in Bilbao where they had lived until the outbreak of the Civil War. Openly against Franco, they fled to France and spent the duration of the war in a camp with other Spanish refugees. But she reiterated that their story was not important. They wanted to hear my account.

"But let's eat first, you poor child; you must be starved." They urged me to eat amply.

I was surprised by the good quality of the food served, in spite

of strict rationing. There was a tasty soup, plenty of fresh fish with fried potatoes, green salad, fruit and cheese. It was a long while since I had enjoyed such good food.

We talked a lot after lunch. I told them my story, why I had to flee France and what had happened during my flight. The conversation was not easy, since it had to be translated to the Irigoyens and their daughter Asun. They listened in awe, almost with disbelief. Then they asked many questions. When I mentioned the disappearance of the Basque guide and my disappointment over the loss of the suitcase, they tried to cheer me, reassuring me that he still might appear before dawn, since he knew their address. But he never came.

Finally, aware of my obvious exhaustion, they had Asun show me to my room.

It was eight o'clock in the evening when I woke up, refreshed and relaxed. Momentarily I didn't know where I was. There was a knock at the door and Doña Carmen stuck her head in.

"You are probably not familiar with Spanish habits," she said with a smile. "Dinner here is served very late. In private homes it usually starts at nine o'clock and in restaurants even later. We hope you will join us now for a glass of sherry and later for dinner. Everybody is anxious to hear more from you and to become friends."

I dressed quickly and joined the two families in the dining room. How nice these people were! Carmen answered many questions I had kept in my mind, not wanting to seem unduly curious.

"The Irigoyens," she explained, "were renting out rooms to vacationers during the summer months, which added some income to the small military pension Don Felipe receives. Most of their clientele were from

Madrid. Doña Catalina did the cooking and Asun helped them, since Pedro, her husband, was invariably away on business.

Carmen explained that she, Antonio and their daughter had only recently returned from France and did not know where they wanted to settle. For the time being they rented two rooms on the next floor with the Garcia family, but had their meals with the Irigoyens. They didn't want to return to Bilbao where they were too wellknown as anti-Francoists and considered Reds. Antonio, before the war, had been a lawyer of repute and since they had lost everything they possessed, he was trying now to build up a new profession by representing several pharmaceutical firms.

Dinner was excellent, although I felt it was too late to eat a complete meal. Another person had joined us, Pablo Morales, a short, stocky man of about thirty. He had a receding hairline and small glistening eyes. He was unkempt, the front of his suit showed several grease spots, his blue shirt crumpled, and his bitten down fingernails were black. During the meal, a sparse conversation was held in Spanish. I listened attentively but didn't understand a word, though I love the music of the language and its strong tones. Of course, I had heard it spoken before but had never listened to it so intently. How nice it would be to be able to speak it.

Mr. Morales left after dinner.

"He is from Valladolid and fought on Franco's side—he belongs to the Phalange," they explained. "Franco was greatly supported by people from Valladolid."

"What is the Phalange?" I asked, embarrassed.

"The Phalange was Franco's army and Pablo is an avowed member. Now he has an important government job, although he spends little money on himself and lives very modestly. He rents a small room here and eats

most of his meals with us. Our ideologies are diametrically opposed and often we have heated arguments. We hope he will never use his position and influence in the party against us, should these quarrels reach a dangerous level.

That night I couldn't sleep, thinking what my next step should be. I was at my wits' end. Should I, in some desperate move, try to enter the British Consulate or should I go directly to the Spanish police? This, of course, might mean the end of everything. I was tired. Hopelessness overcame me. All right, I would wait. After all, what choice do I have? What a disappointment! In my dreams I had seen myself in England, perhaps wearing a uniform in our common cause, having a goal in life. I hadn't expected this! What was I going to do here? Kill time until the war ends? Get into trouble again? What an outlook! And these were supposed to be the best years of my life!

July 22, 1942

Doña Catalina had gone to the market and Asun was cleaning, singing gaily in her pretty voice. When she finished cleaning she brought some bedsheets which had been drying outside on the balcony, put them on the table in the dining room and started to press with a primitive iron that had been heated on coals in the kitchen, a cumbersome procedure but Asun seemed cheerful and lighthearted. She must have a lovely disposition. I watched her while she speedily folded one sheet after the other and I began to feel ill at ease. I was not used to being idle. If only I could assist her, but Asun laughingly refused to accept my offer. I stepped out on the balcony which faced a large patio and the rear of other houses. On most of the balconies laundry was drying in the soft breeze.

Soon Doña Catalina returned from shopping and I watched her unload her bags and prepare lunch. The oil which plays an important role in Spanish cooking is heavily rationed and scarce. I had to smile, remembering Carmen's anecdote. Apparently, Franco is called "Francisco Franco, the VIII-th" because the oil ration imposed by him, is only an eights of a liter per person per week. Meat is rare and expensive but fish plentiful, excellent and freshly caught every day. Bread is being baked from a mixture of corn, beans and other undisclosed ingredients. It is very bad—almost inedible. But I am used to bad quality and scarcity of food. The use of imitation ingredients in France during the last years had prepared me well and Spain is still better off than France.

Noon everybody returned to the dining room, Antonio with a smile on his deeply wrinkled face. Strange, he is not old but his leathery skin, deeply criss-crossed seems that of a very old man. His face reminds me of a bullfighter I had seen in magazines.

"I called a friend of ours," he started right away, "since I know she is the neighbor and friend of the English Consul's wife, and I told Marina about you and your situation. She promised to come to see you this afternoon. I don't know what she can accomplish, but if nothing else, you will at least meet a compassionate person who speaks some French."

Carmen entered the room a few minutes later, dressed in a dark, rather long dress with a thin wool shawl over her shoulders. Why would she wear a shawl on such a warm day I mused and was even more puzzled when I observed her pulling the shawl tighter over her shoulders. With a quick movement she reached out from under the shawl and extended a book to me.

"Here, this is something for you. It will be helpful, I'm sure."

I seized it and read the title: Spanish-French Textbook."

Looking up at Carmen I noticed her expression of pleasure in being able to give someone a surprise. And a surprise it was! I was almost in tears and approaching her to plant a kiss on her cheek I noticed a smell of wine, but of course, Spaniards always accompany their meals with wine. The conversation was animated and everyone tried to teach me words—simple every-day words—things which were on the table.

I feel happy among these people who are so warm, yet it seems unimaginable that only a short time ago, they were persecuted, fearful and most certainly unhappy. The thought gives me an uncomfortable feeling. I can't accept their generosity—I have nothing to offer in return. They are not wealthy. They are hard-working people. What am I to do? The least I can do is to let them know that I am penniless.

After lunch I told them I had no money and didn't want to be a burden to them since I didn't know how long I would have to stay in San Sebastian. Antonio translated my statement and with one voice there came a vehement refusal from all of them. There was no question of payment. One more person to feed didn't make any difference and there was an available empty bed for me. This should be the end of that kind of conversation, they insisted. The word money or payment was taboo from now on.

Having stayed with the Irigoyens for several days I understand that, despite being poor, they are proud, good-hearted people almost to the extent of being self-effacing. This is the second time in my life I have experienced people who help without expecting anything in return, even someone who is not close to them. They are the ones who can least afford it. The most admirable aspect is their disregard for personal danger. There remains nothing else for me but to accept their offer.

After their outspoken protest I opened the book and started to study.

Later that afternoon, Marina arrived with Antonio. He introduced us and I had to tell her all about my escape. Marina listened with undivided attention. A woman in her early thirties, she surprised me with her looks. Although Spanish, born in San Sebastian, unlike Carmen she was blond, blue-eyed and slim. Her skin was white and she wore no make-up. Her quick, nervous movements couldn't hide a Spanish temperament. She also came quickly to the point. She spoke fluent French with a strong Spanish accent.

"It is out of the question for you to go near the British Consulate. I'll talk to Mrs. Fenton and she might find out from her husband what your next step should be. As soon as I get an answer I'll let you know. He is not in San Sebastian right now. It will probably take a few days, so be patient." Her voice was softly persuasive.

"It is difficult for me to be patient. I am anxious to get to England and I feel like a prisoner here. I can't go out. I don't know the language. I have no money. I am here clandestinely. I don't know anybody and I feel terribly in debt to these kind people. Could there be a worse situation?"

To these outpourings of my feelings Marina replied: "Yes, there could be. I understand you very well, but don't forget, you escaped a great danger only recently. You could have lost your life. What does it matter if you have to wait a few days. You are here among friends—keep that in mind, please!"

Later, when everybody else had left, we tried to get to know each other better. Marina told me how she lived with her widowed mother who draws a small rent and she herself worked in a hotel during the summer

months. The rest of the year she earned her meager living knitting and crocheting sweaters, shawls and other woollens. She had two younger sisters who were governesses, one in England, the other for an American diplomat in Madrid. Her father had left their mother when they were very young and they heard later that he was living in Argentina. Marina had a fiancé before the Civil War who fought against Franco's army and died a heroic death. Her dreams shattered, she felt she was living a useless life, but had to take care of her elderly mother who was half-blind.

"The war has ruined our existences," she added. "You cannot imagine what kind of hell all of us here lived through. But let's not talk about these things."

I wanted to tell her that taking care of an old mother did not seem to me a useless life, when she quickly got out of her chair and took both my hands in hers. She pressed them warmly, gave me an affectionate hug and left.

There seem to be victims of the war everywhere; those who lost their lives and others who remain to mourn their losses.

Saddened, I returned to my book and its verbs, nouns and grammar. I don't know how long I studied when I was interrupted by Paquita, the older of the girls. She pulled on my sleeve, asking me something in Spanish. I could only nod and smile, not knowing what she wanted. The girl disappeared and in a while returned dressed in a long skirt, lips and cheeks heavily rouged, a flower behind her ear and castagnettes in her hands. Humming a Spanish melody she started to clap skillfully and danced what seemed to be the Sevillanas, an exuberant dance, then some more moody ones whose names I don't know. She danced very gracefully, demonstrating an inborn talent. Then little Pilar joined in, imitating her older sister though she didn't

look Spanish at all. Her long blond corkscrew locks framed her angel-like face, contrasting with the thin, oval, olive-colored face of Paquita.

The days pass slowly while I study assiduously. Asun helps me, pointing out objects, naming them and making me repeat them until she is satisfied with my pronunciation. For her amusement I often use the French "r" although I know how to roll it since the Czech "r" is formed similarly in the front of the mouth. I have grown very fond of Doña Catalina, a quiet person who is always busy in the kitchen. I love to watch her and learn new ways of preparing food, though she refuses my help. Don Felipe sits around for hours reading the newspaper and humming to the melodies of Zarzuelas coming from the radio.

July 30, 1942

Finally Marina brought news. The British Consul couldn't do much for me, besides, it was untrue that the Consulate shipped refugees to England or Africa.

"I personally feel that Mr. Fenton and his whole staff are under strict scrutiny—their hands are tied. Besides, this part of Spain is heavily penetrated by the Gestapo," Marina reported bitterly, adding: "It is an open secret that their headquarters are in nearby Pamplona with Franco's consent. Franco owes so much for his victory to the Germans that he can't do enough to show his gratitude. But don't lose your hopes, there is a bright side in Mr. Fenton's message. Apparently, in Madrid there is an official representative of the Czech government."

"But there are no diplomatic relations between the two countries, since Franco's regime was never recognized by the Czech government," I

interrupted Marina.

"You are right, but Mr. Fenton is willing to send your passport to the Czech minister to let him decide what to do with you. He wants you to give me your passport and a letter with some details about yourself."

"Alright, I'll do that right away."

"Slow down! I would be unwise to send anything by ordinary mail with the strict control of the Spanish authorities," she warned me.

I was disappointed at the Consul's refusal but realized there was nothing I could do. Nothing was turning out right! I wrote a simple resumé, added it to my passport and handed it over to Marina. I realize the British will not risk their shaky relationship with Spain for a Czech subject. The information I had received from the Freedom Fighters in France was most probably based on their knowledge that officers of Allied armies shot down over enemy territory and led clandestinely to Spain, were helped to reach their home base. But who am I? Certainly not an Allied officer. I now know I couldn't expect any more help than what had been offered to me.

Since my activities are restricted to the indoors I study incessantly. After only a few weeks I can already use short sentences and understand many simple phrases the Irigoyen use.

August 3, 1942

Today Carmen declared that it was time for me to start going out into the streets.

"San Sebastian is rapidly filling up with vacationers. The streets, beaches and coffee houses are crowded. This is the best time to mingle with out-of-towners and you certainly won't attract much attention."

Carmen explained that August was also the month when the whole

diplomatic corps transferred its offices from Madrid away from the unbearable heat. The aristocracy who live in all parts of Spain comes to their villas in San Sebastian and nearby and stay until the end of September. All the important social events and sport activities fall into this time culminating with the Semana Grande, the regatta. Fireworks, dances and bullfights are religiously performed with great pomp.

To my surprise Carmen handed me a parcel and nudged me to open it. And what a surprise! Out fell a pretty summer dress.

"You'd better put it on right away and see how it fits," she urged, despite my reluctance, born of fear.

"Well, hmm, hmm, I can't ..."

"Don't contradict! Hurry up, we don't want to waste more time." I slipped into it. It was a simple striped summer dress, a style that did not need to fit too perfectly.

"Now, where did you quickly find such a nice dress? I can't believe it."

"Elvira, the girl upstairs, is a seamstress. We told her your approximate measurements and in no time she had the dress ready."

"It is lovely, but I can't ...."

"Oh, yes, you can, and Asun is ready too, so let's go."

We went down into the street and walked nonchalantly as if it were an everyday outing. I walked between Carmen and Asun, pleased to be among people again, though nonetheless afraid of being detected. But nothing happened. We arrived at the tree-lined Avenida 14 de Septiembre, which swarmed with vacationers. Carefree shouts and laughter filled the air. People hurried toward the beach which was at the end of the avenue opening to a well-kept park. The blue ocean was visible through the branches of

the trees.

"Let's go to the Concha," Asun suggested, walking faster. Carmen nodded, explaining the word concha to me.

"It means 'shell' and because the bay is shaped like a shell it is called 'concha.'"

We reached the park with its geometric flower beds loaded with brilliantly colored flowers and shrubs that sent fragrant aromas into the air, mixing with the salt driven from the ocean. The picture before our eyes was beautiful. The white sandy beach was in the shape of a half-moon, sprinkled with colorful umbrellas stretched out for several kilometers. Both ends of the beach were flanked by wooded hills that served as breakers for the high waves of the Cantabric Ocean. A narrow gap left by the hills served as entrance for the fishing boats.

"The boats are out now and will come back later in the afternoon," Carmen explained. "Its very interesting to watch them unload their catch."

"What is behind the hill?" I asked.

"The Nautic Club where all the aristocracy and people with big names are members. All those sailboats you see rocking on the water belong to them. Farther down is the Casino. During the Monarchy it was the meeting place of a very elegant public. But since Franco abolished gambling they converted it into government offices."

A huge crowd of people, moving in both directions, chatted happily, seemingly untroubled by world affairs. Of course, they had their war behind them, why should they worry about one which does not affect them—they've had enough of their own sorrows and sufferings. I thought about France before the German occupation and how much the war had changed everyone's life. Will their time of happiness and laughter come back again?

We walked on the promenade and I took in every sight hungrily. On the other side of the promenade were elegant hotels and apartment houses. People were arriving on the beach and taking shelter under parasols. I could have continued for hours. My longing for exercise and fresh air was boundless, but it was my first outing. Anyhow, it was more than I had hoped for. We headed home.

At the table during lunch Pablo Morales, who had noticed that I had been out, surprised me with an offer to show me more of San Sebastian.

"We could take the cog-wheel rail to the top of the Monte Igueldo where there is a splendid view of the bay and surroundings. On a clear day one can see the French shores which might be of interest to you," he added roguishly. Reluctantly Carmen translated his invitation and I answered with a quick excuse. Somewhat peeved, he left hurriedly and I felt relieved that he did not insist.

"It wouldn't be wise to let him know you are here clandestinely," Carmen warned. "Let's hope that he never finds out on his own. He doesn't suspect, but he could become dangerous, should he discover it, so let's keep our distance."

August 4, 1942

Marina arrived with news from the Consulate. They had received an answer from Mr. Zeman, the Czech minister. He regretted not being able to help me. There was no way to ship me to England. They had no need for foreign women. Africa was out of the question. If I needed financial support, he was willing to send a monthly living allowance. This news was a blow to me and my first reaction was one of rebellion. I slowly calmed down yet remained in utter dispair. Marina, with angel-patience sat with me and tried to instill some hope.

August 12, 1942

Gradually my life assumes an aspect of regularity. I acquire more courage by going out more frequently, dividing my walks between Carmen and Marina. Rarely do we all go out together. I sense a strange rivalry between the two women. I seemed to detect a certain bond between Antonio and Marina, yet I was sure it was only a warm friendship. They could have known each other before Antonio got married and perhaps Marina had hoped he would chose her.

August 18, 1942

I am starting to go out alone. My curiosity has gotten the upper hand and I venture in all directions. I prefer the old part of the city with its beautiful churches. I also walk on the other side of the port where an unsheltered promenade is carved out of the rocks, often sprayed by high waves and sometimes even impassable. Gradually I am losing my fear of the police and men in uniform. I even earn a little money. Some time ago I was given the name of a woman who wanted regular body massage. I was happy to do it since the pay was good. In the mornings I would go to the house of the Countess Urquijo and massage her while she was still in bed. Although the work is tiring, I do it for the steady income.

August 22, 1942

Coming back from the countess through the crowded street, I heard my name called, and turned my head.

"Castillo? Is it really you?"

"Yes," he said. "What a surprise to meet you here! You are the last person I expected to meet. I can't believe it! What brought you here and what are you doing? It's years since we saw each other last."

"If I were to tell you all, it would take hours, or even days,

but I'll make it as short as possible."

We found a quiet bench where, in a few words, I explained how I had left France in order to escape a concentration camp, but got stuck here. Suddenly Castillo came up with the question I was afraid to hear.

"Does Miguel know you are here?"

"Oh no, it would be much too dangerous to approach him, or even to let him know. I wouldn't want to jeopardize his situation."

"You know he got married?"

It was a lightning bolt. Miguel married! I turned my head to conceal my feelings and had to grasp the armrest. Castillo sighed. "Do you care to hear the whole story?" Well, I thought, I heard the worst, why not the rest, and nodded silently.

Castillo reminded me that Miguel had returned to Spain at the news of his mother's illness. As if I had forgotten! But the following was news to me.

On his return, the mother was still alive and made him understand he was to take over the family business which had been at a complete standstill throughout the Civil War. The father had died shortly before the war, and Miguel, being the eldest, had to consolidate his affairs.

One day, Miguel was visiting troubled Asturias where the family owned some mines. A stray bullet struck him. Nobody could give an exact account, but he was in a hospital for a long time. Castillo was not sure whether or not Miguel had known his present wife before the accident, but apparently, at the critical time, she had taken care of him and still does.

"He is now in a wheelchair!"

I closed my eyes. Miguel, my handsome lover, a cripple! The pain I felt surpassed by far the pain I felt at the news of his marriage. While

trying to collect my thoughts, I grasped Castillo's hand as if it could give me support.

"Castillo, promise me something."

"Of course, Zdenka."

"Should you ever meet him, don't tell him you have seen me. Life is complicated enough as it is. Swear you will keep silent."

"I swear," he said solemnly, guessing my turmoil—and made the sign of the cross. We sat in silence for some time, then he inquired about my plans.

"I have none. My hands and feet are tied. I can't even go to Madrid where it might be safer for me. In order to travel I need a safe-conduct issued by the authorities. From what I hear, even Spaniards with good credentials have difficulties getting them from the police."

"Let me think. Perhaps I can come up with something," he said, taking a deep breath. "Wait—I have a friend who might be able to help. Can you be here tomorrow at six o'clock? You probably won't want us to come to your place."

"It is out of the question. But I'll be here."

Castillo has not changed, I thought. He was always scheeming, yet helpful. I was always fond of him despite his obscure activities in France.

Slowly I walked home, my tumultuous thoughts occupying me entirely. Miguel married! That certainly was unexpected. What a turn of events! Although I had known from the beginning that the end was unavoidable, there remained a secret spark of hope of finding each other again. The two people I have loved the most in my life had caused me the greatest pain. Wouldn't it be better to walk alone the rest of my life?

August 23, 1942

Today, when I arrived at the bench, Castillo was already there with a younger, heavyset man whom he introduced as Pepe Ballesteros. He was already informed about my situation and right away told me he was ready to help. He could obtain papers for me.

"No problem," he said with a smile. "I need only a small snapshot of you." Castillo, on the other side of me, whispered into my ear: "He belongs to the police force." A mischievous smile crossed his face. I couldn't believe my ears.

"How can you do that, Pepe? Are you a sorcerer?" I asked.

"Let me explain. It is a simple procedure when you're in the right spot. When young women here enter a convent—and this happens almost every day—they are erased from the civil register to which I have free access. According to the register I make out an identity card of the outgoing person, attach your picture to it, stamp it and that's all that's needed. Nothing could be simpler. It's as good as gold and will hold up under any scrutiny."

The urgency to legalize my situation blinded me and without considering it further I agreed to bring a snapshot the next time we met.

On my way home, I realized how foolish I was. I was sure I could never use a forged document. I am much too fearful. But at the same time it will give me some feeling of security. How ridiculous! I must be crazy. Besides, I don't have to use it. So, I will go along with this mad scheme.

August 30, 1942

Castillo delivered the document to me. My name on it is Trinidad Echaso. It seems flawless. I buried it in the remotest corner of the chest of drawers and hope never to have to use it. I wouldn't even dare to prounounce that name!

September 7, 1942

Yesterday I woke up with a sudden toothache and could hardly open my mouth.

"You must see a dentist right away," Marina insisted.

"Yes, I know, but whom? Besides I have no money."

"Let me see—give me a couple of hours. I will be back as soon as possible. Meanwhile ask Doña Catalina for some painkillers."

Marina soon returned. "Come, I have a dentist for you."

We walked over a bridge to the other side of town. On the third floor of an old apartment building an old woman opened the door and led us through a long hallway into a backroom which contained a dental chair and some instruments on a table nearby.

"This is Dr. Egido," Marina introduced a distinguished older gentleman. He will take good care of you as she grabbed a chair and sat down in a corner.

"So, what do we have here?" the doctor asked looking into my mouth. "No wonder you are in pain. You have a huge cavity, but don't worry, we'll fix it in no time." Later he said he knew from Marina that I was a Czech refugee.

"I attended some dental conferences in your country many years ago," he said. "Prague is a beautiful city and I met many friendly people."

When I asked him for the bill, he looked at me with a sad expression.

"I wouldn't forgive myself if I were to charge you. It is a pleasure to treat a young lady from Czechoslovakia." And shaking my hand he added: "Should you need my help again, don't hesitate to call."

On our way home Marina told me how Dr. Egido had been one of the foremost dentists in the Basque country before the revolution. But as a

strong supporter of the Republican party and affiliated with the left wing he was blacklisted and stripped of all his rights, not allowed to work in his prefession, although his old friends, clients and devotees secretly laid claim to his superior skills. I was touched by his kindness. Another plus to my wonderful experiences with the Spanish people.

September 10, 1942

Today, no more toothaches and beautiful beach weather. Marina came to fetch me for a swim. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw the swimsuits people are wearing. Is this possible at this day and age? Suddenly I remembered what Miguel had told me about Spain.

"Europe ends at the Pyrenees, but I hope after the war things will be changing. The clergy has great influence in our daily life and modern thoughts are suppressed."

Is the influence that strong that even the swimsuits reflect their beliefs? The women are wearing old-fashioned swimsuits with skirts almost reaching their midcalves and the men have to wear full swimsuits with short skirts!

"This is ridiculous," I said to Marina.

"Would you believe me if I told you that on most of the beaches in Spain women have to bathe separately from men? Only San Sebastian has the privilege of common bathing thanks to the many foreigners and the international diplomatic corps who come here every summer."

"I can't believe we are in 1942! I don't think I could wear such monstrosities," I laughed.

"OK," Marina agreed, "let's go to Ondarreta. It's a longer walk along the Concha, but at the end there is a reserved stretch on the beach for the diplomats. I don't think we will be bothered there by the police

who continuously check the beaches. Especially if we speak French we will be safe."

We walked about twenty minutes. The farther we went the less crowded were the beaches.

"Next time we take the tram," Marina said, "but the walk is pleasant, don't you think?"

We reached the end of the bay which is hugged on one side by the Monte Igueldo and on the other by the rocky Monte Urgull. On the bottom of Monte Igueldo was a stern building that mars the beauty—a dark stone edifice that did not fit into the surroundings.

"That is the prison for the whole province," Marina explained.

"What an irony, to stick a prison here in such a beautiful spot—but at least the prisoners have a nice view."

"Oh yeah! Look, do you see any windows? The holes in the wall are tiny yet still covered with iron bars."

Sept. 15, 1942

The people appear on the beach late in the morning. In Ondarreta, many are members of the diplomatic corps but most belong to the Spanish aristocracy. The luxury is unbelievable. Yesterday, a group of eight settled down next to us. A valet spread out a blanket, set down plates, glasses and silverware. After their drinks, he started to serve lunch. This spectacle of a fully-dressed butler with white gloves serving a group of half-naked people seemed to me grotesque.

October 22, 1942

San Sebastian, now left to its self by the many summer guests, offers little entertainment. Although coffee houses are usually full with habitués, the streets are deserted, except on holidays which break the monotony of daily routines.

One day a military parade with all its pomp marched through the main street, flags waving. Never had I seen such a spectacle. Driven by curiosity I approached the curb, and was gradually pushed to the front. Marina followed on my heels. First Franco's colorful mounted guard appeared waving flags. People shouted "Arriba España." Suddenly I felt a sharp blow on my underarm which was simultaneously lifted into the air, held up by Marina's umbrella.

"For Heaven's sake, hold your arm out," she whispered, fear visible in her face. "You have to greet the flag adorned with those five little arrows knotted together. Don't move now!" Marina looked around, carefully watching to see if any person made a suspicious gesture, then heaved a sigh of relief and pulled me away.

"You don't know how dangerous this is," she explained. "These patriotic people can be very nasty. Fortunately, there were no Guardia Civil nearby, the ones in green uniform and three-cornered shiny black hats and guns."

November 1, 1942

Winter has started relatively early. The winds blow fiercely with nothing to break them, bringing cold into town. Heavy rains followed fog, moving like a gauze curtain, blocking out the lights on the bay.

Marina and I have become good friends, with much in common. I learned the language quickly and now speak it almost fluently. We usually climb a hill called Monte Urgull, and often, when the weather permits, provided with sandwiches and fruit, hike up the Monte Ulia farther away. The state of the war is the main topic of conversation.

The other day, on our way back home, we met Miss Nina, an English teacher, a friendly old spinster. Even from a distance you could tell

she was English. Very slim, clad in tweed, comfortable shoes and a felt had. No one else in San Sebastian would dress like this. She invited us for a cup of tea in her home only a couple of blocks from the Irigoyens. I was happy to be able to brush up my rusty English. Miss Nina even offered to give me free lessons, she enjoyed talking with me so much.

November 18, 1942

The lessons offer many pleasant hours and Miss Nina seems to enjoy them just as much. She is a refined person with a special charm. We always have lively conversations and the lessons turn into social visits.

One day, out of the blue, she asked; "Would you like to accept a job? You would be perfect for it. Now listen. Mrs. Ortega—a widow—has a seven-year-old boy. Her husband was killed at the outbreak of the revolution, when the child was still a baby. The boy goes to a Jesuit school where he apparently gets some education in languages, but she would like him to speak more German. You would spend lunchtimes and most weekends with him, going on walks together, speaking German. Ramon is a heavy child who needs not only instruction but also exercise. You will have lunch every day with the boy and Mrs. Ortega. She will pay you adequately for your services."

I liked the idea of this job right from the start. It sounded terrific. Miss Nina gave me the address and it was agreed I should call and introduce myself the next day.

A maid opened the door and led me to an elegant drawing room, furnished with antiques, beautiful paintings on the walls, and oriental carpets. Mrs. Ortega entered with outstretched hands and invited me to sit down. She was slight in stature and dressed in black. Seven years a widow, I thought, and still in mourning!

Very gracefully she explained what was expected of me. Finally, with a sigh, she asked if I would mind playing soccer with her son right after lunch, adding apologetically: Ramoncito is rather on the heavy side and doesn't like bodily activity, but he does need it."

"Not at all," I answered. "I used to play soccer with the boys when I was growing up."

The door opened and the boy entered. He kissed his mother who then introduced me as his new teacher. Ramon shook hand with me politely and shyly looked away. The introductions made, Mrs. Ortega reached for a silver bell lying on the small onyx table at her side and rang for the maid.

"Would you please serve lunch?" she ordered and moved toward a two-winged heavy oak door. We entered a dining room with a glassed-in alcove in which stood a small round table set for three. A beautiful damask cloth covered the table and the heavy silverware was immaculately polished. Each course was served on embroidered linen and the food was delicious. I felt transported to another world. I looked out of the window at the rain clouds moving fast across the sky. A small opening in the sky let in a few daring sun rays and the rain drops which had collected on the tree in front of the house started to dance like millions of sparkling jewels.

"It might be too wet to play outside," Mrs. Ortega remarked, setting down her demi-tasse. "Would you like another cup of coffee, Miss Vodak? And may I call you Zdenka?"

"Certainly, Señora," I answered holding my cup for a refill. "Would you liked us to go for a walk and get acquainted?"

December 15, 1942

Ramon turned out to be an intelligent, pleasant and docile boy. He does not like to play soccer, nor does he enjoy hiking. He would rather sit at home and read. But he is well-mannered and obedient. I grew fond of him and feel sorry for this lonely little boy, growing up without a father.

Marina has introduced me to her circle of friends who meet every afternoon in the Café Madrid. They seem intelligent, well educated and informed people, greatly interested in the march of the war. They accepted me with open arms. Arturo, completely bald and with a great sense of humor—I have to listen carefully to understand his jokes, is the undisputed leader of the group. He dissects the news, knows how to read between the lines, and explains with his sharp mind the situation. His wife Teresa, a tiny woman with a porcelain-like face, supports his analyses. Dora, a bleached blonde spinster of around forty, comes with her old father and amuses everyone with her sharp wit. And there is Ramona, a retired school teacher, who lost her job because of her political affiliations. I like them and they seem to like me. The informality of our meetings isn't unlike our casual gatherings in pre-war Paris. I see no how it is possible to make new friends no matter what happens. These friends here are against the Franco regime and this common sentiment has cemented our friendship. They are careful when talking about conditions in Spain and politics. They always look around before making a statement, especially when it is not favorable. It reminds me of France under the German occupation.

December 28, 1942

It had been raining gently, pleasantly. The Pyrenees were hidden

in mist and a gay rainbow hung in the sky, one tip touching the wild rocks, the other lost in the distance towards France. Gazing at the rainbow I quickly made a wish: Dear God, bring us peace soon and let me go home!

January 30, 1943

I cannot believe it is 1943. Where did the time go? Christmas was a loud affair, not at all what it is elsewhere. People from the whole apartment building ran and danced through the house making as much noise as possible with pots, pans and metal lids. So far I could not find out why. The main holiday is the sixth of January—when the three Kings bring gifts to the children. The whole thing was a let-down.

One day I fell ill with pain and a high fever. The doctor diagnosed flu, prescribed all kinds of medication and ordered me to bed. When I was finally on my feet again and ready to pay him for his many visits, he would not accept a fee.

"You are a refugee, are you not?" he said indignantly. "I wouldn't dream of accepting money from you. Just do me a favor and don't get sick again, and take good care of yourself." How I love the Spanish people!

February 15, 1943

I resumed my work with Ramoncito, in spite of feeling quite weak, and again joined my friends in the coffee house. Good news about the war had spread quickly and our souls were filled with joy. Stalingrad surrendered! Napoleon couldn't make it and neither could Hitler. I thought of the unknown German soldier who must have received my skis after they were requisitoned from my home in Brno. Is he now running back on them? I felt malicious glee, to say the least. The radio announced the retreat and although we couldn't rejoice openly, our shiny eyes and smiles

gave away our state of mind. Is this the beginning of the end? The myth of German invincibility is finally broken.

April 20, 1943

With the arrival of spring the weather changed rapidly. The earth is covered with a cloak of green. Trees, bushes and flowers stand in full bloom. The Easter Holidays are here. A sweet aroma permeates the boulevards and parks of the town. Street cleaners work arduously on sidewalks to prepare for the Easter festivities. San Sebastian's people fill the streets again, playful children chase each other along the promenades where nurse maids in fancy apparels proudly push the high prams covered with elegantly starched linens.

Scaffolds were built for the Easter parade. I watched the impressive religious spectacle. Hooded and barefoot people, men and women walking in slow steps, some dressed as Roman gladiators, some holding burning candles with out-stretched arms, others carrying statues of saints dressed as idols in embroidered silk and velvet covered with precious stones.

Mrs. Ortega had asked me to accompany them to church. When I agreed I didn't know that I would have to go with them to all the churches in town, and listen to endless singing. I even had to kiss the feet of the statue of Christ. I wore my only good suit, made of wool, and suffered in the unseasonal heat. On my way home in the later afternoon, exhausted and irritated, I noticed a man following me. My God, I thought, that is all I need—he must be a policeman! I accelerated my steps—he did the same. I slowed down—he held the same distance. What was I to do? Stop suddenly and confront him? No, of course not. I wouldn't dare. Was this the end of my freedom? I became frantic and started to run, perspiration trickling down my temples. Instinct guided me to the crowded boulevards, where I

tried to lose myself among the people returning from church. Around the corner stood a group of people. I circled them and stopped short behind them. Breathlessly I looked around. I had lost him. Slowly I regained my composure. I had escaped this time, but when will the endless running cease? Why not give up? What's the use? Some day I will be caught. Why fight it? Suddenly I thought of Milan, my aunts, uncles and friends in the concentration camps. Wouldn't they be happy to be able to run? Immediately the bitterness disappeared and I felt ashamed of my weakness. Don't give up, I said to myself. You have to be strong. You will be needed when this nightmare ends. The day will come when they will get out and you want to be there.

I started to move again, walking towards home. I turned my head at every corner to be sure I was safe.

"Where have you been?" Carmen enquired. "We were worried." I could hardly speak.

"A man followed me. I was sure he was a policeman so I ran and ran until I lost him."

Carmen started to snicker. I looked at her in amazement. How could she be so heartless about such a serious incident?

"Zdenka dear, you know what it was? A man who liked your looks and wanted to make your acquaintance. This happens here frequently, you know," she said, giggling.

"What makes you so sure?"

The surest sign is that he was alone; the police always walk in pairs. Forget the incident. Have a glass of wine with me and then go to bed and don't worry!"

Still my excitement lingered and I didn't pay much attention to

Carmen's irrepressible already tipsy giggle. When I kissed her goodnight her breath reeked of alcohol and I had to help her to her room. What a pity, such a lovely woman, and so good-hearted. She'll ruin her life.

April 30, 1943

The other day, Mrs. Ortega had one of the Jesuit fathers over for luncheon. During the conversation I mentioned my unpleasant adventure with the imagined policeman. I knew Mrs. Ortega had been previously informed by Miss Nina of my irregular situation with regard to the Spanish authorities. I had insisted that Mrs. Ortega know about it. The priest had listened silently with raised eyebrows.

The next day Mrs. Ortega asked me into her library. She was very apologetic when she told me that father Ignacio had warned her of the danger of having me, an illegal resident, in her employ. I understood. She pressed an envelope into my hand, saying she had been very satisfied with my services, but no longer dared employ me.

My pain over the loss of my job was forgotten when I returned home to find Carmen face down on the floor of her room.

I tried to turn her over and called for help. Antonio was not yet home but Doña Catalina and Felipe came right away. Carmen's lips were blue and her face puffed up, barely recognizable. While I was wiping Carmen's face with a towel, Antonio appeared.

"Thank you," he said gravely. "I think I can take care of her." We all left them, and back in the dining room we discussed the situation. They told me that Carmen in the last months had been drinking heavily, mostly cheap wine. Antonio, not knowing how to stop the debts she incurred in local bars, had made an announcement in the town newspaper declaring he would not be responsible for her bills. When Carmen found out she had

no more credit, she sold the few belongings she had. One day she even tried to hock their bed sheets.

May 6, 1943

Carmen is gravely ill. The doctor diagnosed cirrhosis of the liver.

May 20, 1943

Carmen suffered a great deterioration and finally died. I am grief stricken. I had loved and admired her. Antonio suffers in silence. Only Mercedes seems composed. I wonder whether she understands what a precious human being she has lost. As for me, it is the first time I had witnessed the slow self-destructive death of a dear friend. Had Carmen been deeply hurt in the past? Why did she drink? These questions torment me.

I feel more than ever my isolation from my old friends and home. News from home is non-existent and because of strict censorship I dare not correspond with friends in England. Receiving any mail might jeopardize my present friends' security.

June 12, 1943

What an extraordinary encounter! On my way home I bumped into a handsome officer—well, handsome in some way. He looked at me and exclaimed: "Mademoiselle Zdenka! You are Mlle. Zdenka, aren't you?"

"Do I know you?"

"Don't you remember? We met in St. Jean when I accompanied Mrs. Basteret, one of your students." Then he added quickly: "Marques Figueroa, you must remember me!"

How could I have forgotten! Of course, Mrs. Basteret, the beautiful hotel owner. She had introduced him as her fiancé. Slowly it dawned on me and I remembered that encounter in the street. Later I had seen them frequently together. He drove a car with a CD license, which intrigued me.

I had associated his aristocratic title with some diplomatic service without giving it a second thought. But his looks were different then. At first I didn't know why but suddenly it came back to me. I remembered the extraordinary appearance of the couple—Mrs. Basteret, a beautiful blonde in her early forties, laughing happily and visibly proud of her elegant Spaniard. I judged him to be at least sixty. They seemed well matched. He was tall, exceedingly well groomed and very erect which made me think he had swallowed a ruler. But now, this man wearing a uniform suprised me. I found my composure and queried after Madame Basteret.

"Oh, she is fine," and as if wanting to make me forget Mrs. Basteret he added quickly: "But more important, what are you doing here?"

"I left St. Jean last year because life became very difficult. Now I am waiting here for the end of the war."

"Do you have any friends here? I'm sure you must have a novio. A pretty girl like you does not stay alone for long."

Laughingly I shook my head.

"I can't believe it——an attractive girl like you! But let's sit down and have a glass of sherry."

I couldn't say no, so we went to a coffee house. I felt uncomfortable with a man in uniform, but nobody paid us any attention. We talked about St. Jean and about his weekend trips there, and generally chit-chatted.

When I got up to leave, he kissed my hand and asked to see me again.

"Well," I said, "I don't know." The prospect of meeting him again did not appeal to me.

"Maybe you would like me to take a message to someone in St. Jean? You might think about it and let me know next time we meet here, shall we

say Wednesday at 6:30?"

I agreed reluctantly and thought about this encounter on my way home. I was puzzled to say the least. His fiancée was much more attractive than I, so it surely wasn't sexual interest. Also, I could see we had nothing in common. His was a different world that I was not interested in. Well, whatever, I dismissed the whole episode as unimportant, though it occurred to me that he could perhaps, with his diplomatic privileges, bring me my belongings from my former landlady in St. Jean.

We met again on the terrace of the Café Madrid. Mr. Figueroa sat at the table, his back straight as a poker, his military cap on the chair next to him. I noticed the left side of his chest was covered with ribbons and medals. A few more and he would surely topple over. I wondered in which war he had obtained them. He was charming, telling me all kinds of little stories, obviously trying to show his best side, though I couldn't help feeling somehow suspicious.

"Do you go out a lot?" he asked.

"I'm not the type. I think I am more of a homebody. Besides, it wouldn't be fair to enjoy life in a superficial way while family and friends back home are suffering. My conscience wouldn't allow it."

"But you are much too young to think that way!"

"Maybe, but we don't live in normal times and I am pretty much affected by world events. Of course, once the war is over, I hope the circumstances which make me live this way will change, but until then I have to live with as little excitement as possible." I watched the passersby and sipped my sherry in silence.

"Would you join me for dinner?" he asked.

"I am sorry, but I can't."

"I am disappointed, I was hoping we could spend a few more hours together. You are such an interesting woman and we have a lot to talk about."

"May be next time." While I was thinking that I had no wish of meeting him a next time I could at least ask him the favor.

I explained about my belongings and gave him a note for Mme. Lafargue in St. Jean.

"I'll bring the suitcases to your place on Monday," he promised.

"No, no," I certainly didn't want that.

"Well then, you will have to collect them from my place and take a taxi home." It was agreed.

June 23, 1943

Yesterday after work I took the tramway to the other side of town. I was happy in anticipation of getting back my belongings. It was the expensive part of town, a long row of modern apartment houses, directly opposite the ocean. Fortunately there was no inquisitive concierge watching.

The elevator stopped at the fifth floor and immediately the door of the apartment opened as if I had been annouced. In the doorway stood Mr. Figueroa. He pulled me in quickly. I was surprised to see him dressed in a short, heavy silk dressing gown and an ascot tie. Again he kissed my hand ceremoniously. What a pompous ass, I thought.

A table was prepared for dinner. On the buffet was arranged some food and a bottle of wine.

"I am so glad you came."

Of course, I thought, I came to get my suitcases—what else did he

imagine—but I said: "I'm anxious to know whether you brought my suitcases.

"Zdenka, please, sit down. I know how eager you are, but I must disappoint you. I went to the address you gave me, I saw Mr. Lafargue, gave her your note and asked for you suitcases."

"What happened?" I interrupted impatiently.

"Apparently, immediately after your departure, the Gestapo came round. They were furious at not finding you and made off with the suitcases. But Mrs. Lafargue says your silver flatware is well hidden in her safe and will be waiting when you return after the war."

I was stunned, not about the loss of my leather bags, clothes, family pictures of parents and grandparents which could never be duplicated; my mother's handwritten cookbooks, which I cherished so much; my notes and cosmetic formulae from the school in Paris. All that was now lost for good! Those accursed Nazis. First they stole my home in Brno and now the little I had scraped together with such difficulty. God only knows what monster is playing on my steinway and what twerp in Russia is using my skis. What good is my photo album to them? To calm down I stepped through the French window on the balcony.

The cool wind hit my face and tousled my hair. I didn't mind. It was still light but the sun had plunged beneath the ocean, wrapping the horizon in a red hue. I took a deep breath, filling my lungs with a good portion of salty air and stepped back into the room, having curbed my disgust. I was ready to tackle Mr. Figueroa in his silk dressing-gown.

"Let's eat," he suggested. I sat down while he opened a bottle of wine. It was a cold buffet, exquisitely prepared. Mr. Figueroa, apparently wanting to please me, selected a variety of delicacies and put them on my plate.

"I didn't expect a dinner, Mr. Figueroa."

"Call me Rafael," he said, raising the glass and looking deep into my eyes.

"Salud," I answered, thinking: "You rascal, who do you think I am?"

"How is Mrs. Basteret?" I thought I would remind him of her existence.

"Oh, she is very busy. Her whole hotel is now occupied by high-ranking officers and is partly converted into a club for them. What have you been doing since I saw you last?" It was obvious he didn't want to be reminded of Mrs. Basteret.

After dinner he offered me cognac. "Just a drop," I grasped the glass reluctantly. "Besides, I have to leave."

"The evening has only started."

"Yes, I know, but I have to get home." I got out of my chair and stretched out my hand to thank him.

"Not so fast, Zdenka." He took my hand with his left and resting the other on my shoulder pushed me gently to a door and opened it. I could hardly suppress my surprise. A huge bed built between three walls, was surrounded by mirrors with more mirrors on the ceiling. I felt my body stiffen but had the presence of mind to say: "How ingenious." At the same time I broke away from him and energetically pushed him aside. He lost his footing and slumped face down onto the bed.

"Sorry, Rafael!" I called, half-way out the door. "Thanks for the delicious dinner!"

June 30, 1943

The summer season in San Sebastian begins again. Beaches and cafés

are filled with vacationers, and entertainment is in full swing. Regattas take place almost every day.

July 15, 1943

Today I received my first postcard—addressed to me—in this country. What a delight! Mr. Zeman, the Czech minister, is visiting San Sebastian with his wife next month and wants to meet me. I could contact them to make an appointment. Very informal! I am looking forward to the meeting and also to the opportunity of speaking Czech again. When was the last time? I can't remember. It seems it was in another life. When the British Consul here contacted him on my behalf, Mr. Zeman apologized for not being able to help me, but offered me some financial support which I rejected—enough reason to be curious to make his acquaintance. I think I shall send flowers to their hotel.

August 12, 1943

I am enchanted with the Zemans. What a charming couple. I didn't expect them to be so friendly. I am a refugee and a nobody. They are good representatives of our country, true diplomats in every sense.

They were pleased with my flowers and invited me for lunch in their hotel, an elegant affair. Mr. Zeman again apologized for not having helped me reach England.

"I have no influence and can do only minor bureaucratic transactions" he explained.

August 18, 1943

"How would you like to see our best bullfighters, Manolete and El Cordobés," Antonio asked.

"I don't know, I saw one in Bayonne a couple of years ago and didn't like it."

"It's different here and will be more exciting—Manolete is unsurpassed. You shall come with me and Marina."

I decided to accept. It was afternoon, the sun was boiling. All roads to the bullring were jammed with a sweating mass of people. Many women were dressed in the typical Sevillan costumes, flowers wilting in their hair. Some wore black mantillas crowned by high combs, others white lace mantillas, usually precious heirlooms passed from generation to generation. The gates to the ring were open, swallowing the surging noisy crowd. Flags waved in the breeze. Vendors sold pistachios, drinks, fruit and painted fans. Half the spectators sat in the glaring sunlight—the cheap side, the other half in the shade. In the vast arena there was freshly strewn sand.

Suddenly the trumpets blared. Two horsemen in medieval attire circled around the arena. The gates opened and the bullfighters paraded into the ring, followed by the banderillèros, then the picadores on horseback. Closing the parade were the mules bedecked with feathers and bells. They stopped before the balcony where the governor sat with other city dignitaries and their wives. After the greeting ceremony all participants disappeared behind the gates. The show began.

First came the banderilleros thrusting their decorated darts into the bull's shoulders. The picadores on horseback did the same with their lances, one of the many occasions I turned my head away, preferring to watch the spectators. Each time the bullfighter made a skillful movement, the crowd roared, but when he was clumsy they burled cushions into the ring. But for the colorful spectacle and the visible excitement, I would not have enjoyed the afternoon, although I did get a vivid sense of the danger involved in facing an angry two-thousand pound bull. It was

a cruel game and I shuddered to see the slaughtered bull dragged behind mules from the arena.

On our way home we stopped at a café where Antonio left us for a game of cards. In the next booth sat an old woman whom I had seen several times before. She looked interesting, somehow foreign.

"What a warm day," I said encouragingly, though not very imaginatively. The woman smiled, pleased to be drawn into a conversation.

Her name was Sabine Cassel, and she was indeed a foreigner, a German, now living in Madrid, who summered in San Sebastian.

"I came to Spain a long time ago to join my son who was King Alfonso's personal physician," she explained. "He died very young and left me alone. I didn't want to return to Germany since my husband had passed away earlier. I tried to make the best of it here."

September 30, 1943

Mrs. Cassel is very knowledgeable and alert and makes me forget our great age difference. Perhaps I see in her my grandmother. She tells us delightful stories of the old days under the monarchy. On the other hand, she is fascinated by my adventures, and encourages me when I am distraught over the war and concerns about my family. And we discovered a common denominator: our exhilaration at news of German defeats in Russia, or the establishment of beachheads by the Allies.

Through Mrs. Cassel I have made another friend Madeleine, a girl from St. Jean whose mother, by a remarkable coincidence owns the hotel where Pavel stayed when he visited me. Not only that, but Madeleine is governess here in San Sebastian to the two daughters of the Counts of Covarrubias whose estate is being administered by the Lupins in St. Jean.

Madeleine is bright, soft-spoken, and I like her modest demeanor, yet I feel there is a dynamic energy hidden under her outward appearance. Her practical outlook on problems instils me with admiration. On her days off we meet frequently. Our conversation is usually about the war, her home town and our plans for the future. To have her as a friend is a delight.

The other day Madeleine was with Marcelle, another French girl, also governess in a Spanish family, but what a difference from Madeleine. Marcelle, a typically lively Parisian of about twenty-five, with peroxide-blonde hair and a happy disposition, takes care of four little children belonging to the Marquis de Churruca.

"I love the children and I know they need me," she explained. "Their mother doesn't have time for them, although their father shows more interest and spends some time with us. He owns a racing stable and I too enjoy the horse races. I love the children and they adore me. This is truly the right job for me, though I'll return to Paris after the war. I hope to get back my office job," she confided in me.

"Soon we will be leaving for our home in Madrid, but I promise to come back next summer."

CHAPTER NINE

January 15, 1944

Another year gone by. The war continues at full swing and no end is in sight. Last autumn the Allies invaded Italy and Mussolini, the once proud invader of Abyssinia and powerful friend of Hitler, toppled. I remember seeing him in Rome, many years ago, when he marched in front of Marconi's funeral procession. I was surprised at how short he was.

My coffeehouse friends and I were amused to see the Italians declare war on Germany. But it is a strange war. First the Germans had an agreement with the Russians and promptly attacked them. Now the Italians become our allies!

The wind-swept streets are empty and drenched. Fog puts little halos around the street lamps. Few houses have heating and the dampness creeps into everybody's bones. The braseros with white hot cinders—the only source of warmth in our house—are not much help, though pretty to look at. They are located beneath a small round table covered with a heavy cloth. Sitting at the table, one has to cover one's knees with the cloth. That's fine for my feet but my back remains icy.

February 15, 1944

I have a new job—as governess to a fifteen-year-old girl. My duties are simple, to keep Consuelo company and to speak French with her. Her parents, the Urrutias, live in a beautiful townhouse on a tree-lined boulevard which runs beside the river Urumea.

Mr. Urrutia, who is honorary consul to Argentina, might, with his

connections, be able to help me acquire a Spanish residency permit. He is astonishingly youthful for having four children. What a good life these aristocrats have. Do they ever have any worries. Consuelo is the oldest child; the boys have their own tutor. She seems unfriendly and sullen, a pretty, somewhat awkward girl, a teenager in her worst years. I wonder how difficult it will be to handle her.

For days Consuelo refused to talk to me. We went on silent walks, with her a step ahead or behind. I waited patiently. Her French was not going to improve this way.

Finally the ice broke when I started to talk about movies. Her eyes lit up and she condescended to talk. Love stories interest her most and Bing Crosby is her favorite crooner. So we now go frequently to the movies, sometimes alone, sometimes with her girlfriends.

March 1, 1944

Spring came and outdoor activities started again. Although Consuelo is no sportswoman—at least not an active one—she loves to watch sport events and we frequently go to see the hockey games. I tried to entice her for some tennis, but to no avail. She remains a sedentary enthusiast. Mrs. Urrutia, at least, seems happy about Consuelo's acceptance of me and I enjoy the easy occupation and good pay.

April 12, 1944

Consuelo has pleurisy. I have to sit at her bedside and entertain her. The stock of Bing Crosby records is exhausted in the stores. I try to read her stories in French but they bore her. The cook often brings me wonderful desserts which help me overcome my weariness. We both look out of

the window with the same wishful thinking for a quick recovery.

May 5, 1944

This morning I called at a new beauty salon in town that Madeleine had told me about, run by a Czech woman. When I addressed her in Czech, she grabbed me and pressed me to her bosom.

"I thought I was the only Czech in Spain. Where are you from?"

"Brno. And you?"

"Prague. Come into the back where we can talk."

Bedra, around forty and a striking, statuesque woman, was in Prague during the German takeover. When people lined up to watch the parade she had made it her duty to hit with her umbrella every arm raised in the Nazi fashion, "so they would think twice before doing it again."

She had married a Spaniard, which enabled her to get out of Czechoslovakia, and now made a handsome living with her beauty treatments. Her clientele are mainly drawn from the aristocracy. She seems to be a very positive person, vivacious and lighthearted, characteristics which go well with her tizian-colored hair and strikingly luminous eyes.

"You know, it is really a coincidence that you know skin treatments," she said. "I need someone and you would be the perfect person, if you would be willing to help out." I accepted without hesitation and later joined Bedra and Juan for dinner at their modest apartment they had remted for the summer season.

It was late when I finally arrived home and the main door was already locked. I had to clap hands in order to summon the "sereno," a sort of night watchman holding keys of all the houses in the block. I could hear him tapping the asphalt with his pole indicating that he had heard me. How incredible, I thought. I have lived here almost two years yet have never

before come home late enought to need to use the old-established custom of a "sereno."

May 15, 1944

The last weeks I spent much of the mornings helping Bedra, the afternoons with Consuelo. When everything went smoothly, another unpleasant adventure happened. Men! What's wrong with them? I met Pablo Morales in the street. On several previous occasions he had shown an interest in me and frequently had asked me to meet him in a coffee-house. I had always refused but finally I ran out of pretexts. To get him off my back, I agreed to his invitation for a merienda (high tea) in the countryside, a few miles outside San Sebastian. Fifteen minutes by tram and we arrived at a garden-restaurant in the hills, cloaked in bucolic silence. Everything in bloom could have been a sample from Monet's gardens. We chose a table in the shade. A lazy stream flowed nearby, it was the perfect setting for a lovers' tryst. But not with Pablo! How foolish of me! I never should have come and wondered how to get out of it.

Our conversation touched, as usual, on Franco, and our heated arguments led to nothing. We were at political loggerheads and I had to watch what I was saying. He is an ardent follower of Franco and gained his good position only through being a party member. He does not agree with any of my democratic ideas.

Pablo ordered some food. Everything was delicious and despite the unpleasant feeling, I ate with good appetite. As soon as he lighted his smelly cigar, I excused myself for the bathroom. Coming back I declared I had been deadly sick and insisted on going home. Pablo tried to persuade me to "rest a while" in one of the guest rooms but I wasn't falling for his lecherous tricks. On our way back we sat in awkward silence and I

wondered how all this had affected his ego. I should have guessed his intentions and I really should have known better. But I have only myself to blame. Will I ever learn?

June 1, 1944

At the end of May, the Irigoyens heard from friends in Madrid who wanted to rent the room they had rented in previous years—my room! The Irigoyens were upset and did not know what to do.

"That is no problem," I assured them. "Since I cannot pay the price you get from the summer guests, and I don't want you to lose money, I'll move out for that short time until they return to Madrid." The Irigoyens were relieved, and I soon found a nearby room to rent.

June 10, 1944

The news about the flying bombs over London is shattering. What about the people there? Where are my many friends? I hope they found shelter in the country side. I am thinking of Mirko. Where could he be? It is so discouraging not to hear from anybody. I wish prayers could help.

June 13, 1944

The Allies have landed in Normandy. This is definitely the beginning of the end, a great cause for celebration. Marina and I packed sandwiches, a bottle of wine and a giant cake, and set off up the trail, in high spirits. We took with us also binoculars, which we frequently use these days to scan the horizon for allied landing craft. Actually we had expected them to land at the Cote Basque.

Today we came to a plateau where several old cannons were guarded by Spanish soldiers. I wondered whether these museum pieces were supposed to repel an invading army. They must have been remnants from the Civil War.

We continued our hike until we found a comfortable place on a boulder. A panorama of mountains, forest and deep blue water offered the most spectacular view. Rocky outcroppings tumbled into the ocean, hugging sand coves alternating with stretches of white beaches. Towards France the mountainside sloped gently. Slowly we climbed down. It took us some time to reach the beach where two boys scampered in the dunes with a dog, their gleeful shouts sharp against the roar of surf and the hum of the wind. Except for a flock of snipes flying over wind-whipped reeds, we were the only living beings around. We returned home exhilarated and with confidence in our hearts that peace was not too far away.

June 20, 1944

I regularly go with Marina to the beach, where we meet Marcelle who is usually with the four children. Their father joins them frequently. I could detect a certain affinity between the two, and it did not surprise me when Marcelle told me they had been in love for some time.

"But, Marcelle, this is terrible," I said. "Does the Marquesa know about it?"

"I doubt it, she is much too busy with herself."

CHAPTER TEN

September 12, 1944

I cannot believe it. I am sitting in the express to Madrid, where I was hoping to be two years ago. Better late than never! I don't know what will happen to me next.

Little did I know what was going to happen when I left for work that fateful morning of July 18, after two police detectives had inquired about Claude, the young Frenchman in the boarding house where I rented. I had met him only twice but knew he was a friend of Madeleine's. Fortunately, he was away on one of his mysterious trips. After searching his room, the men's interest turned to me. I didn't feel I had to worry, and it was only when one of them started to go through my belongings that I realised my precarious situation. He found and confiscated my counterfeit document, then to my astonishment both men left. I hurried to Bedra's shop where I was due to work that morning and related the incident.

"I think it would be better for me to get out of here. Since I am not supposed to work, I don't want to embroil you in my affairs." I left for the Urrutias, via the pharmacy to pick up cough medicine for Consuelo. It took some time to fill the prescription and I was in a hurry. I was about to enter their house when two men stepped from the doorway and planted themselves in front of me.

"You are Zdenka Vodak?"

"Yes."

"You are under arrest." My brain stopped functioning, but somehow

my legs carried me like an automaton through the streets to the Casa del Gobierno.

I was interrogated. How did I come by the fake I.D. card? I told them the truth, actually half the truth, since I had no choice.

"Who fabricated this document?"

"Pepe."

"Pepe who?"

"I don't know."

"How did you meet Pepe?"

"On the beach."

"And you told him right away you needed an identity card!?"

"Of course not, we met several times and became friends and later on I confided in him and he offered me his help."

"You never asked for his name?"

"What for? 'Pepe' was good enough for me."

"Think some more," they insisted. It occurred to me I could give them any name. I was tired and could only think of the word 'almohada' (pillow).

"I think his name was Mr. Almohada."

"That is no name."

"That's not my fault, but I think that's what he said."

"You know, we will extradite you back to France or to the Germans," they said.

"You know, I have never used this identity car." I added in my defense.

The interrogation ended and I was led to a dungeon, four wet walls and a pungent smell of mildew and urine stung my nostrils. Dim light shone through a bulb covered with a thick layer of grime. There was no window,

just one wooden stool in the center of the stone floor. At first I clenched and unclenched my fists, then sat impassively on the stool. I expected to see rats, but was too lethargic to watch out for them or even to care.

I don't know how I survived the night. Even sitting on the stool became painful. There was nothing to lean my head against and from time to time I would come to with a jarred and painful jerk. Time floated in endless waves so slowly that it hurt me.

Next morning there were more questions, this time concerning Claude. How long had I known him? His activities? Who were his friends? Strange questions, I thought. Finally, I was ordered to deposit on the table my rings, watch and other belongings, which were sealed in an envelope. Then I was led into a small cell containing a bench. I stretched out and fell asleep immediately.

I awoke to hear Bedra's indignant shouts through the wall. "You can't do that to an innocent girl! Where is she? If you don't release her I'll complain to Franco." /Her voice reached a strident pitch. I could hear only Bedra, and could picture her piercing blue eyes and flaming red hair, an angry Valkurie storming down Valhalla! Righteous Bedra, who wanted to protect me like a mother hen protects her chicks! When she finished her tirade a firm male voice said: "If you want to help your friend, you'd better bring her a change of clothes. Good bye!" Silence. I wondered what time it was. Damn it! Why did they take my watch?

A man entered with a tray of bread and coffee. I drank but left the bread untouched. Who could eat under such circumstances? Again I dozed off. The noise of a turning key woke me and there stood Madeleine before me.

"Madeleine, what are <u>you</u> doing here?"

"I'm detained too, but let's talk about something else." She signalled to me to keep silent and sat down next to me.

"This place is probably bugged," she whispered.

After a time the door opened again and I was led away, managing first to embrace Madeleine with an extra-hard squeeze for encouragement. We reached a simple office with several desks but no personell around. I spotted a familiar leather bag. It was mine, stuffed with personal things. Good old Bedra!

"Would you like me to call a taxi?" the man asked.

"A taxi to prison—isn't there any other way?" Why should I spend money for a taxi? Besides, I am in no hurry, I thought.

"Well, we can take the tram," he said. I agreed. The man carried my bag and we walked a couple of blocks to the stopping point. I decided to stay on the platform of the tram although there were plenty of empty seats. I wanted a last look at the bay and the sunset behind the Monte Igueldo. God only knows when I will see that again, I thought. Hungrily I soaked in the beauty, almost forgetting that I was on my way to jail. The imposing prison building came in sight, throwing its ugly shadow on the deserted beach.

A sudden thought crossed my mind:

"Do you mind if we walk the last stretch? I need a little fresh air."

"All right," he agreed, "but we must hurry—it's getting late." What would happen if I made a dash for it? What would he do? Does he carry a gun? But I quickly discarded the idea. Where could I run?

The gate opened and a nun lead us to a reception office. After the formalities she asked me why I was in Spain without a permit.

"I fled from the Germans and wanted to go to England, but got stuck here."

"I hate the English," she said. Her words shocked me, not so much for what they meant but because of her unexpected vehemence. She asked me my nationality, but not my religion. Perhaps it did not occur to her that I could be anything but Catholic.

"Sister Engracia will take you to the recreation room where you will spend tonight only, since it is too late to put you into a cell. The lights are already turned off and the cells locked."

The recreation hall was vast and empty. Wooden benches stood alongside the walls. There was one mattress on the floor, with a folded blanket on top, no sheets or pillows. Sister Engracia left and I searched my bag for sleepwear. There it was, a pretty silk-and-lace nightgown. Just the right garb for prison, I thought and lay down. In the dark something tickled me. I turned on the light and saw my vermin-infested mattress. Bed bugs and cockroaches, startled by the sudden light, criss-crossed the floor in all directions. Sickened, I jumped up and spent the night sitting on one of the benches with the light on.

In the morning Sister Engracia returned to escort me to my cell, through a long hallway past several wooden doors with small windows protected by iron bars. She opened one and gently pushed me in. Two other inmates stared at me in disbelief.

"My name is Zdenka, what is yours?"

The thin, emaciated one, said softly: "I am Juanita and this is Isabel," pointing to a pretty heavyset girl, no older than eighteen. "Mercedes, is outside fetching water."

Juanita turned out to be very pleasant, about twenty-three years of age, the only political prisoner. Her life story moved me to tears. Barely eighteen when the Civil War started, she had married her boyfriend

who was immediately abducted and presumably killed by Franco's men, accused of being a communist. She was arrested as an accomplice, transferred from one prison to another, while her petitions to Franco were ignored. San Sebastian was one of the better jails, she told me, and she was resigned to her fate. Having contracted TB in these long years of confinement, she didn't expect to live much longer.

Isabel and Mercedes were prostitutes, like many others who came and went. These women never stayed very long, depending on their offenses.

"Where can I wash?" I asked.

Juanita pointed to a metal pot. "You can fetch water in that from a tap at the end of the hall and may use our little basin."

I surveyed the drab room. A small wooden table and two chairs were the only furniture. Four mattresses were on the floor. In one corner was a wooden box which was the toilet. Next to it stood a pail.

"Is that all? Am I expected to use it in full sight of the others?" I had not expected the "Ritz"—but this? They shrugged their shoulders. I found a piece of soap in my bag and grabbed the jug.

"I will go with you," Juanita said. At the faucet a few women were lined up. They stared at me. Juanita pointed at one of the older women.

"She is here for murdering an old couple—for money—and that fat one had twin babies with her brother and killed them shortly after their birth."

"Nice company," I said, returning to our cell, and to myself, "What do you expect? Countesses."

Gradually I was introduced to the prison routine: In the mornings, at 7 o'clock, we stood in front of the doors, washed and dressed, to receive black coffee and one slice of bread. Then the floor had to be

scrubbed with brush and water.

I learned that the mattresses were never cleaned, and mine was previously used by a woman with syphilitic wounds on her legs.

The mornings passed with common prayers in the big hall, presided over by one of the nuns. One morning, I had another surprise. Madeleine joined our ranks. We sat on the floor, consoling each other.

With Madeleine's support, I later demanded a curtain for the toilet. We received a blanket which we were able to hang on a cord.

How did we spend our days? I don't know. One melted into another. The monotony of the routine lulled us into lethargy. Endless prayers were sung in the big hall, after which we could walk for fifteen minutes in the patio. While Sister Engracia sometimes read morality stories and parables, most of the long-term prisoners kept busy with needlework that was sold outside. Meals consisted mainly of a watery soup of cabbage, potatoes and bread, served in another hall on benches at long wooden tables. Only spoons were given to us. Evenings were short. At eight o'clock we were locked in the cells with the lights off. After that, one of the sisters made the rounds controlling the inmates through the bars in the doors. Despite the suffocating heat, I had to cover my sleeveless nightgown with a blanket. "It is indecent," the nun objected.

Visiting time was fifteen minutes each week. These fifteen minutes kept us going.

Bedra told me on her first visit: "When I enquired about you at the Municipal Office they wouldn't give me any information. They wouldn't tell me where you were or what the charge was. They only said if I cared about you to pack a suitcase with the necessities a woman needs for a stay away from home."

One day for refusing to go to early mass, I lost visiting privileges for the week. I had spent the whole night fighting an army of bed bugs with the only weapon at my disposal, a burning candle which I ran up and down the wall next to my mattress. But the more bugs I killed the more reappeared. Did the live ones come to bury their dead relatives? I mused. Ceaseless menstrual cramps exhausted me even more. Finally, with dawn approaching and the bed bugs retired, I slept, only to be woken by the nun at five o'clock. I simply could not move.

"All right," said the nun. That takes care of your visiting privileges this week."

The French Consul, who was in contact with Madeleine, promised to do everything in his power, but warned that it might take some time. We understood. Our expectancy was not high. Like the Czech representative, he was on a low rung of the diplomatic ladder in Franco's Spain. Meanwhile our friends showered us with all kind of edibles which we gladly distributed among our cellmates. One day I mentioned aloud that I longed for a hot bath. The next day the old murderess approached me and whispered: "For five Pesetas I can prepare a hot bath for you in Mother Superior's bathroom." I knew she was taking care of the nuns' bathroom but did not dare to accept her offer for fear she might kill me while I soaked defenselessly in the tub.

With all the monotony of prison life, I do remember a few brighter moments. One, especially, stands out. Once, while we sat in the assembly hall busy with the customary prayers, the nun in charge was called out and right away the buzzing of our voices filled the air. One of the women called out to a pretty young gypsy:

"Rosita, show us how you steal a chicken." Rosita darted into the

center of the room, her long skirts brushing the floor. Her movements were infinitely graceful.

"Cluck, cluck," she called to an imaginary chicken, moving her skirts back and forth until the "chicken" was near enough. With a quick polished movement she caught it, turned its neck and hid it under the skirts. The performance was a perfect sample of beauty in motion and we almost thought the poor chicken was real. We laughed and applauded until the nun returned.

When Rosita was released she left her vermin-infested valise in exchange for one of ours. But I forgave her—the entertaining performance was worth it.

Madeleine requested and received material to teach the girls how to write and read. They were eager to learn. Indeed, it was heartbreaking to hear of the poverty in which they had grown up, pushed out into the world at an early age, unprepared to earn a living except by selling their bodies.

Occasionally Madeleine and I philosophised, and her stoicism had a tranquilizing effect on me. One day I surprised her by saying: "I'll forget what is NOW. Only the past and future count. The present does not exist since in a few seconds it is already the past. So I won't complain anymore about my being here." Madeleine looked at me incredulously, but then admitted: "There is some truth to it. The idea is good and I hope it will help."

Finally I was released, a short and simple procedure. In the prison office I received my belongings, signed a paper to that effect and was handed a certificate of discharge. The door opened and I was free again.

Madeleine's release was still very questionable at that time and

I knew she would miss my moral support. But I finally got all the answers to the puzzle of my detention. And what a story I learned.

Madeleine and Claude worked with the French Resistance, frequently crossing into France to help allied airmen shot down over enemy territory escape to Africa, the last link of that chain which led all the way south from Holland. Both Claude and Madeleine knew this stretch of the Pyrenees, having grown up nearby. Somebody in the group turned traitor. Fortunately, Claude escaped, but they linked me with him because I was there when they searched his room. Then they found my forged papers. Madeleine had made a big mistake, keeping an addressbook with the names of many of the airmen. They now had real proof of her entanglement.

My life had very likely been saved by Mr. Urrutia. Concerned when I didn't show up for work, he called my landlady and learned of the police search. Then his concierge told how two men had first questioned her about me, then taken me away. Mr. Urrutia suspected foul play and called the Governor Civil, a friend of his. "I told him I knew about your irregular stay here but assured him you were a good person and certainly no communist, which is the main worry of this government. The governor was puzzled since he is the only person who dispatches detention orders. He immediately investigated. Apparently, the order came from Gestapo headquarters in Pamplona, conveniently located near the border. Your bogus identification card saved your life. The Spanish police took over the case and snatched you away from the Gestapo who would have eliminated you one way or another. I doubt that the Spanish authorities would extradite you to the French because they are aware of your situation, as well as of Gestapo intentions. So you see, you were sitting pretty safely in prison. No matter how bad it was, consider the alternative."

I had listened intensely to Mr. Urrutia's explanation, not daring to interrupt him.

"What will happen to me now," I asked.

"Have patience, Mr. Zeman in Madrid is working hard on your case. And meanwhile you are free."

When finally the doors closed behind me, I was euphoric. I was free! I walked home, breathing in the clear air and ready to embrace the world.

A happy event had taken place while I was behind bars. On August 25, de Gaulle entered Paris! If only I could have been there on the Champs Elysees to greet the French heroes.

I was myself greeted like a homecoming soldier believed dead in combat. Celebration upon celebration followed. One evening we ate in the old part of town. The sidewalks were bustling with strollers, wandering from one 'tasca' (bar) to another to take their aperitifs before dinner. I walked with Marina, Antonio, Bedra, her husband and Asun, to work up an appetite. When we reached the corner of the Church of Santa Maria, a woman suddenly jumped out, embraced me and called joyously: "Zdenka, Zdenka, you are out again!" I was taken aback, but quickly recognized one of my former cellmates. She looked different, of course, prettily dressed and heavily made up. To my friends' amusement it happened again at another corner, only this time it was Isabel. Did my friends tease me afterward! Of course, I let them, but my thoughts were with the girls who had the misfortune to be born into poor families—many times not even families—and being condemned to live in a country with few social services or education opportunities for the poor. Moreover, there is little

understanding by the socially privileged class. But who am I to preach?

"I am leaving within a few days," I announced at dinner.

"What do you mean?" Marina gaped.

"You can't do that," Bedra protested.

"Let me tell you," I begged. "Mr. Zeman is a friend of the first Secretary of the American Embassy. He put a good word in for me to the Governor in Madrid and obtained my release from prison under one condition. I have to leave San Sebastian and live with the Secretary, under the protection of the American Embassy."

Everybody spoke at the same time, more questions than I could answer.

"I don't know more details. They have a 10-year-old daughter and very conveniently need somebody to watch over her. I only have a few days left here and my train ticket is in the mail."

Bedra expressed her pleasure, saying she was very much looking forward of meeting me in Madrid.

"I want to go too," Marina exclaimed with a determination, I never before had seen in her. "I too will find me a job as a governess in an American family.

This time the farewells were not as painful as those of the past. Hope was in the air, hope for a meeting again in a not too distant future. I realized as the train pulled out that again a leaf in the book of my life had turned and a new chapter was in the making. Would it be a happy one?

October 1, 1944

So many things happened since my last entry, I hardly found time to make notes.

Traveling to an unknown town to live with strange people was, in a way, as exciting as it was many years ago when leaving Brno for the first time. Strange, how history repeats, although in this case "history" is my life and I am only a little grain of sand in the huge desert. I arrived in Madrid late in the evening, and took a taxi to the Bradshaws' address. Immediately I noticed a more pleasant temperature—there was no humidity. Of course, there is no ocean. Madrid is in the center of the country, on top of a barren plateau, the highest European capital. We stopped in front of an elegant building—two stories high—in a quiet side street.

A man in uniform appeared. "The Counts of Vilanueva live upstairs," he explained, "and the lower floor is rented by the Bradshaws, an American family. Are you their governess?"

A servant opened the door and led me into a tastefully furnished libary-salon. Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw sat on opposite sides of a coffee table strewn with magazines and newspapers. Both greeted me warmly, and Mrs. Bradshaw was especially concerned for my well-being after the long tiring trip. She speaks French badly with an atrocious accent. Mr. Bradshaw became very businesslike as soon as we were seated.

"My readiness to accept you in my private employment facilitated your release from prison. As soon as you feel ready I'll send you with an employee of the Embassy to the Spanish Government office for all the necessary permits."

Mrs. Bradshaw explained what was expected of me. I would breakfast daily with Patty, then take her by Metro to school, fetching her again at noon for lunch. In the afternoons I was to help Patty with her French homework, then after dinner free again.

I am quite awed by Mr. Bradshaw. He is the first high-ranking

American diplomat I have known and his manner intimidates me. I wonder if our relationship will be give and take or "Yes Sir, No Sir."

Mrs. Bradshaw invited me to meet Patty and we stopped off first at my cozy well-decorated room. Patty sat at her desk reading, either too shy to speak or not sure of anything to say in French.

I was back in my room unpacking when there was a knock and a servant entered.

"I am Candelas. May I help you unpack, or shall I prepare the bath for you?" I could not help grinning. A few days ago I was a prisoner living under subhuman conditions and now I have my own servant who wants to draw hot water for my bath!

"Thank you, Candelas, I can do it myself."

"Oh no, señorita, that's what I am here for."

I followed her to the bathroom where a selection of soft towels and steaming hot water were waiting. What a sybaritic lifestyle! When did I last revel in such luxury? Oh, yes, that was in my former life, eons ago.

October 11, 1944

So many new impressions! I don't know where to start. The day after my arrival I took Patty to school. She objected and her desire for independence is obvious. Breakfast is served by Amanda, a beautiful young woman from Asturias, with a walk and carriage of a queen. She sails through the rooms with a smooth gliding step, her head so level she could carry on it a jug of water over rough ground without spilling a drop. The dining room in this mansion impresses me the most. The floor is of white marble, the walls are partly covered with silk and priceless Gobelin tapestry on one side, French windows the height and length of the other, looking out on a large atrium. Chandeliers give the look rather of a dance hall than

a dining room. Patty sits across from me at the other end of the table at a great distance which makes it difficult to converse. Her knowledge of Spanish is poor and her French is next to nothing. She is full of mischief, as only a ten-year-old can be. She confessed to me that her last governess left on her first day and the previous ones did not stay much longer. I think I won her over the other day when, in a moment of anger, I told her:

"I came to you in the hope to find a little friend, one who could help me forget that I am alone in the world." That seemed to work, although it was a dirty trick!

A French cook was in charge of the other servants. A staircase led down into a cavernous kitchen in the cellar. How strange, I thought, such an important working place in such an unhealthy, almost putrid location. The servants' rooms don't even have windows. No wonder there were so many dissatisfied people in this country. Their position doesn't seem to have improved with the Civil War. The cook's husband is part butler part chauffeur, and he drove me to the Immigration Department with an employee from the U.S. Embassy who explained he would fix residence papers for me. At the Casa del Gobierno we met the Governor, who had a friendly smile. I felt half the battle was won and after signing some papers, we left with the residence and working permits in my pocketbook.

"How simple 'impossible' things can be when one has the right banner in one's lapel," I smiled to the American, pointing to the little American metal flag in his buttonhole. And to myself I congratulated at having, for once, the right connections.

It was time to fetch Patty from school. Children of all shapes and sizes came running out the door. No Patty! Did I miss her in the crowd? I waited and waited until a janitor locked the door.

Insert on p. 235, third paragraph, after Spanish life takes place in the streets and sidewalks: Here, you could sense the past: beggars, vendors, fortune-tellers. In these streets you rub shoulders with ghosts from the past, Goya, Cervantes.

Anxiously I took the next Metro home, knowing the earth couldn't have swallowed her. I was greeted by Patty, gloating at the door.

"Wasn't I clever to escape your attention? I hid between two taller girls. You see, I don't need you chaperone me." Subsequently, she persuaded her mother that she was capable of going to school unaccompanied, which relieves me of that chore and gives me even more free time. I savor it fully.

I walk through the streets of Madrid, admiring the old buildings, monuments and historic places. I am reminded of my first adventurous steps into the center of Paris, and make comparisons. Whereas Paris was cosmopolitan yet so French, Madrid is much smaller and pure Spanish. It is their capital, whereas Paris was the world's metropolis. Spanish life takes place in the streets and sidewalks. Traffic is light since there is no import of cars. Friendly pedestrians show me the way when I am lost. Some men whisper harmless remarks as they pass, others are less innocent.

October 16, 1944

Finally I visited an American physician. I recounted my unfortunate ordeal in prison and he freed me from my worries about syphilis—the Wasserman test proved negative. Through the International Red Cross I sent off a missive to Mirko. I also contacted the Czech Consulate in London with the hope of tracing Pavel. My hands trembled when mailing the letters. Are they alive and will I hear from them?

October 19, 1944

Madrid's sky is crackling blue, the air crisp and invigorating. I take strolls with Patty and the poodle, Bella. Our home is on the outskirts where the new university buildings stand. Most of the old ones

are in ruins—there must have been heavy fighting all over the area. The other day, while Patty played with the dog, I sat on cement blocks, at one time the foundations of a family home. Sadness overhelmed me. So much senseless destruction! My thoughts moved toward my own home. Will there still be a home? The papers mention some bombardment of town in Czechoslovakia. Only one bomb is needed to destroy so much.

Life with the Bradshaws is pleasant. They are very active socially and seldom dine at home. When they do, I am invited afterwards for coffee in the library. Mr. Bradshaw is a strict stepfather and Patty is afraid of him. I feel sorry for her. She adores her mother. Unfortunately, she knows of too many quarrels. Mrs. Bradshaw is an alcoholic, which causes many unpleasant incidents. Patty is also a lonely child. Her only friend is Pilar, the daughter of the Counts Vilanueva, who is a couple of years older.

November 1, 1944

The other evening we had a dinner party to which I too was invited. I was pleased—even flattered—sitting between Mr. and Mrs. Zeman. I told them how happy I was and thanked them again for their intervention. I am surrounded by pleasant, cultured people, and by unexpected luxury. What's more I no longer have any fear. It is hard to believe that only three years to the day have passed since I was taken to the German prison fearing the worst.

My job is easy—too easy—and does not keep me busy enough. I'm reading English books and my English is improving. Patty too likes to read and frequently I have to urge her to turn out the lights past midnight. She is one of those children who don't need much sleep.

November 10, 1944

So far I have seen Bedra only twice since she returned from San

Sebastian. She's very busy.

"I'm glad you've found such a pleasant niche with the Bradshaws, but aren't you bored?" she asked.

"Not since I discovered the treasures in their library." Bedra put me on to an Argentine client of hers who needed a French tutor for her eighteen-year-old daughter. I accepted the job and it turned out to be a pleasant occupation. Two hours in the morning, twice a week. Ines is intelligent, serious minded and surprisingly old-fashioned. Her father is a wealthy industrialist and the family spends half the year in Spain, the other half in Buenos Aires.

December 12, 1944

Mr. Bradshaw took us out today in their baby-blue Chrysler, which attracts too much attention. There are not many cars that size and color in Madrid. We drove to Chinchon, about thirty miles away. The countryside was not very interesting but the town is very old and famous for its square that doubles as a bullring. The cold weather did not deter children from standing around, staring in awe and trying to touch the car. I'm sure they never before have seen such a "monster." In the evening I visited Marcelle for the first time. Her Marquis has her in a luxury apartment "Back Street"style. I didn't know whether the Marquise had thrown her out or whether she had left on her own. I did not question and don't really want to know. I just wonder how long this will last. Perhaps as long as the war, since she plans to return eventually to Paris. Meanwhile she is radiantly happy.

Marina came shortly before Christmas. She found a job with an American family, taking care of a little boy, and seems happy. I think she mainly wanted to get away from Antonio to give him time to make up his

mind. She loves him and wants to get married. Antonio, who had been very much in love with his wife, needs perhaps more soul searching.

It has been very cold these days. There were some snow flurries and I am suffering frostbite on my feet. The chilblains burst and I have trouble getting into my shoes. The doctor prescribed some ointment. I only hope it will help. Mrs. Bradshaw was drunk again and Mr. Bradshaw had to cancel a dinner party after finding her incoherent in bed with a few empty bottles underneath. He beat her and she was screaming. Patty, who witnessed it behind the door, is terribly upset. When these episodes take place, she is very difficult to handle. I wouldn't be surprised if she runs away one day. I have to be especially careful with her. It seems the hatred for her stepfather is consuming her.

January 4, 1945

Christmas was heart warming, with a huge tree in the salon, and everybody in the house receiving gifts.

My chilblains are slowly healing and I can wear shoes again. Marina insisted on showing me how the Madrileños celebrate New Year's Eve. I met her at the corner of the Puerta del Sol where a crowd of singing, swinging people were gathered, waiting for the midnight church bells. With each chime one is supposed to swallow a grape—to bring luck in every month of the coming year. At each swallow I wished for the end of the war and to see Milan and Pavel again. When the last bells died away, people hugged and started to dance.

As I had not heard from Mrs. Cassel for some time, I decided to pay her a visit and wish her happy New Year. On the way I stopped at a flower shop and bought a small potted plant not wanting to arrive with empty hands.

At her apartment in an exclusive hotel in the Calle Velazquez I had to ask for admission at the concierge. With a surprised look at me and sad timbre in his voice he asked: "Don't you know? One morning Mrs. Cassel was found dead in her bed by an employee. There was a faint smile on her lips." In my sadness I slowly walked home. I will miss her.

February 12, 1945

A letter from Mirko. I sat down and stared at the envelope. I couldn't believe it. Finally, I slit it open with trembling hands. I read "Dearest Zdenka," and could not continue for a few minutes. My tears blinded me. He is still alive! Then I read and re-read the few lines. I don't know how long I had been sitting there, my hands in my lap, holding the letter, when Patty came in.

"What happened to you?" she asked and seeing the letter, "Do you have bad news?"

"To the contrary—this is the first letter I received since the war started. Moreover, it's from my fiancé." Her eyes lit up at the word.

"You have a fiancé—how romantic! Do you love him? What does he write?"

"Yes, Patty. I love him and he loves me. He writes that the thought of me and his love for me has sustained him through all these years of war."

"Where is he?"

"He is not allowed to say, but I know he is not in combat now and he is anxiously awaiting the end of war, like I am."

"Are you going to write him every week?"

"Of course, this is one way to keep the soldiers going. One needs something to hold on to, you know!"

March 2, 1945

Mrs. Bradshaw left for the United States and I was put in charge of the personnel. I don't like the responsibility, especially since Mr. Bradshaw is very difficult and demanding. I have to check the expenses of the cook who does the buying. I know she charges at least ten percent more than market cost. Amanda also, cheats, polishing only one set of silverware which she sets at Mr. Bradshaw's place. Patty, who knew about Amanda's laziness, rushed into the dining room at the last moment and switched the cutlery before Mr. Bradshaw entered. He was furious and made a song and dance. But, he was right of course. I felt it cast a shadow on my capability of keeping the household going the way he wants. I hope Amanda learned her lesson.

It never rains but it pours. Candelas, my servant, got sick with pneumonia and a dangerously high fever. She had difficulty breathing and I tended her every hour with medicine and compresses. Her throat was rattling and I could only but wait for the crisis to break. It was touch and go, but thank God she survived.

March 20, 1945

I took Patty to the flea market, the Rastro. Vendors crowded the sidewalk with rows of stalls, piled high with everything—mostly junk. We wandered up and down, touching and bargaining without intending to buy. A little boy who had followed us for some time finally pulled at my skirt.

"Señora, look," he said, unwrapping a gold ring from a paper napkin. "Hundred pesetas." While I bent down to see, he looked around furtively to make sure no policeman was watching. He wanted me to believe the ring was stolen. You little rascal, I thought, but played the game with him. After some haggling I bought the ring for ten pesetas. Patty was very excited.

"It is pure gold, isn't it?" she asked anxiously.

"I doubt it, but it is a pretty ring and if you like it, that's all that matters."

March 30, 1945

Mrs. Bradshaw finally came back with a new fur jacket and a brand new convertible. I was told she underwent a hysterectomy, not wanting to be bothered by the menopause. I didn't realise there were physicians who would perform such an operation when not necessary. Anyway, she is back now and I am glad for her and for myself. I also appreciate the nylon stockings she brought me.

April 2, 1945

Our first outing with the new car was a great success. Mr. Bradshaw, always combining pleasure with education took us to Alcalá de Henares. The air was faintly rosy with dust, the bare ground a fluorescent tan that deepened in places to terra cotta. It is said that Cervantes was born there and studied in the beautiful 15th Century university.

April 13, 1945

Roosevelt is dead, a great president. Harry Truman succeeds him. I don't know much about Truman, but we shall soon find out.

Letters from Mirko arrive frequently, containing expressions of much love, desire and plans for the future. He can't wait to hold me in his arms. I write every week. Patty explained to me that I must sign my letters with many exes, in place of 'kisses.' She is very interested in sex. At her age I didn't know what sex was. To my dismay I find my love for Mirko has cooled off, though I must continue to write letters. Soldiers need them for their morale.

April 16, 1945

Yesterday, Mr. Bradshaw brought home two tickets for the theater. We saw an excellent performance of Othello—in Spanish, of course. I wonder how much Patty understood.

April 20, 1945

He is alive—Pavel is alive! I just came home from Marcelle. We had tea together. She bores me with her love stories. She is getting ready to go to Seville for the Easter holidays. Her Marquis has big properties there and the family always spends the Semana Santa in Seville where most of the Grandes of Spain celebrate.

Patty had greeted me at the door, triumphantly waving an envelope. "A letter from England," she shouted, "Mirko wrote!" Right away I knew it was not from Mirko. And when I opened the letter and saw Pavel's handwriting, I knew I wasn't alone anymore and a tiny light on the horizon started to glimmer. My doubts are finally ended. I had asked the International Red Cross to search for Pavel, though I was half afraid to hear the truth. I read and re-read the many pages as my five years of loneliness sank into oblivion, wiped out by the knowledge that he is alive. Dear Pavel—it hasn't been easy for him either. He described his passage from St. Jean.

> "The boat was overloaded, almost to the point of capsizing. There were bodies everywhere and no room to lay down. Food and water were dangerously low and some died. After a couple of weeks dodging U-boats and escaping two air attacks, we arrived safely in Plymouth to be greeted like heroes. And do you know how lucky I was for not having been accepted on the first boat? It never arrived. It's still laying with its human cargo on the bottom of the ocean, torpedoed. I was allowed to stay in England, though not accepted

in the Army. My knee injury prevented any active service."

He had held several short-lived jobs, finally moving to Leeds where he works as designer-manager in a textile factory. He is very happy, likes England, the people and their lifestyle, and has made many friends. His excitement at hearing from me was ecstatic. The deportation of all Jews from the occupied countries to concentration camps convinced him I must be dead.

For a long time after reading Pavel's letter I sat motionless. Darkness began to surround me but I hardly noticed it. I suppose I wept. I don't know.

Tomorrow we are going to the Embassy. Some sort of a party. I wonder how it will be.

April 30, 1945

Dear God, what people can be made to do to each other. I should not have gone to the Embassy. I am sick to my soul. How does the world still spin? They showed hideous pictures, taken by American soldiers, of concentration camps. Corpses were piled on snow patches and next to them inmates with shaven heads who didn't seem humans but live skeletons, clad in shreds. These were the unfortunate survivors. Their hollowed eyes must have witnessed indescribible horrors. The bridge between dying and living seemed unhinged. I had to leave. I realise that Milan, Aunt Mathilda and others of my family were probably there!

May 8, 1945

A beautiful spring day. The acacia trees that line the Calle Princesa are in bloom and spread their sweetness through the air. Crossing the Plaza España I heard considerable noise but paid little attention. Reaching the Gran Via I noticed unusual excitement and a crowd had gathered.

A loudspeaker boomed:

END OF WAR!

Tears ran down my cheeks. I had to stand still, I was blinded. All those years I thought it would never happen. My thoughts started to scramble. I rushed home to share the joy. Over a BBC broadcast we heard the ecstatic cries of the people mixed with the sound of Big Ben. What a happy feeling! Imagination ran away with me. Soon I'll be going home and soon I'll be embracing Milan. From now on life for me will again be worth living.

May 20, 1945

I was disappointed. Peace wasn't celebrated as I feel it should have been, but I forget Spain, though neutral, was backing Germany. After all, Franco owes his victory to Hitler's help. I think of the wounds Fascism has inflicted on us, and of the scars which will stay with us for the rest of our lives.

I haven't heard from Mirko for some time. I expected a jubilant letter plus anxious enquiries about our next meeting and marriage plans. God, how I dread it! How will I be able to explain that I'm not in love with him and that marriage is out of the question. What a crazy situation. How does one write a refusal after so many years of expressing love? I don't want to hurt him. Will he understand?

June 9, 1945

Today would have been my tenth wedding anniversary with Karel. This morning I scrutinized myself in the mirror. Yes, I am the same girl from Brno. Outwardly nothing much has changed, my figure is still as svelte as ten years ago, my complexion as fresh and unblemished. But the mouth, though smiling, has lost its innocent smile, and the eyes look

as if they have seen too many ghosts. And inside me, the innocent trust in people and in myself is gone. But I have gained understanding of others, no longer taking for granted love and friendship. In order to receive love one has to give love and one has to show appreciation for it.

While busy with my thoughts, Patty came running into my room.

"Oh, do I have exciting news! You'd better sit down, Zdenka." In her hand was an envelope, but it was not the letter she seemed excited about.

"We are going back to America," she squealed, dancing in circles around me. "I'm so happy," she was singing. "Tra-la-la! Mommy just told me." She carelessly threw the letter at me: "Here, from Mirko, of course," and out she ran.

The sudden decision of the Bradshaws surprised me. But perhaps it was not so sudden, perhaps I was simply last to know. Again, another change in my life!

Remembering the letter I opened it and read:

Dearest Zdenka,

No doubt you too have celebrated the end of war. It is a great and wonderful feeling to have been a small wheel in the big production. But, on second thought, it was perhaps not such a "small wheel" since we were willing to give our lives and were fortunate to keep them. Though our bodies are unscathed, our souls have suffered. And now I have to add more pain to yours. I wish I could tell you without hurting you, but it has to be said and I beg your forgiveness. I met a British nurse. We fell in love and plan to marry. She is willing to follow me to Bratislava as soon as I am discharged from military service. I'm sorry to cause you this disappointment. I think the long war is more to be blamed than I am.

Thanking you for your love and all your letters which helped me maintain my sanity, I wish you all the luck and happiness in the world. I hope you will find a man who will be more worthy of you. Mirko.

So, that was it. He is blaming the war, but I don't agree. Our relationship stood on a rocky basis from the very beginning. I know I never would have consented to marry on such a loosely woven basis as our correspondence.. But for my conscience sake, I am glad it is he who untied the knot.

Patty was disappointed that my affair with Mirko was over.

"Are you very unhappy?" she asked me. "Do you want to die now?" I shook my head, but not wanting to leave a false impression, I told her: "It isn't necessary to die of a broken heart, or jump into the ocean, when rejected by a lover."

June 25, 1945

The Bradshaws told me last night of their intention to leave Spain, but assured me it won't be before late in the year. Mrs. Bradshaw invited me to accompany them—her husband could help arrange the visa—but I must stay in Europe, return to Czechoslovakia and reunite with my brother and the rest of my family.

July 1, 1945

La Granja! Mr. Bradshaw had to leave for London, and the Countess Vilanueva invited Patty and me to their summer residence at La Granja, in the Sierra Guadarrama. She will be there with Pilar while her husband is away on a bird shoot with their older son. Mrs. Bradshaw was supposed to drive us up, but at the arranged hour I found her too drunk to sit at the wheel. We got her into a hot bath and brewed some strong coffee, to no avail. The Embassy eventually sent a chauffeur to drive us up.

The countess received us warmly and Pilar showed us to our rooms. A couple of years older than Patty, she is much more mature, perhaps because she is a lonely girl. Outside the little town is a castle, built by Philip V. The surrounding gardens are a copy of Versailles, though sadly neglected at the present time. A vast forest extends from the other side of town, and the area is known for the breeding of bulls for Spain's most important bullfights.

The days went by very fast, between morning outings on bicycles, short walks in the afternoons and visits to castles. The day before we returned to Madrid we had a little adventure, scary at the time, but amusing looking back. Patty and I were on a picnic hike in the beautiful woods, and climbed a fence into a glade to eat. I thought of our dense pine forests at home, the sundancing leaves of the birches, beeches, limes and sun-drenched thickets. It was idyllic, the hills dazzled in a cloudless sky, the aroma of ripe berries filling the air. Suddenly I glanced up to see several huge brown bulls charging toward us, heads down.

We ran blindly down the hills, stumbling over roots and outcrops of rocks until we reached safety. In my mind I had seen us already gored by those wild beasts.

The Countess laughed so hard at our adventure that tears came to her eyes.

"There are no bulls in this neighborhood! Don't you know the difference between bulls and cows?"

"Yes," I said, embarrassed. "But I really didn't have the time to look!"

Back at home we are faced with a terrible drought. The Manzanares river has dried up, leaving pebbles, broken glass and other debris in its

bed. Electricity is off during daylight and we had to get typhoid shots with the disagreeable reaction of a high fever. We drink bottled water sold at a high price. People who cannot afford it fill the hospitals with typhoid. The swimming pools are closed. Patty has become obnoxious. Mrs. Bradshaw has left for the United States preparing their home for the family's return and Mr. Bradshaw had a brilliant idea.

"Why don't I take you both up north, away from this unbearable heat." So we are driving to Fuenterrabia, a fishing village next to Irun, near the French border, a stone's throw from San Sebastian.

August 1, 1945

Fuenterrabia was delightful. We spent most of the time on the beach and even visited San Sebastian a couple of times, though it isn't the same anymore. I guess one never should go back. I couldn't put my finger on it, but the disappointment I felt made me sad.

August 7, 1945

Yesterday the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, leveling the city and killing almost hundred thousands. Did the end justify the price? The implications are immeasurable. I am incapable of grasping the horror of such an action. Did humanity sink so low that human lives have no value anymore? Did the misery of men involved in tragedy of such a dimension as the war, bring out the worst in them? What good will come out of it? Perhaps the prevention of another war?

September 10, 1945

The Great War is over. The conflicts that soaked the world in blood for six years are ended. I received a few letters from foreign countries. Slowly old friends find each other again. Czechs in London founded a club that started collecting addresses of emigrés.

The first letter I opened was from Franta, postmarked Algiers. He does not say much about himself. I imagine he has taken part in the African campaign. He is happy to know I survived and is anxious to hear from me. The second letter was from Pavel.He wants me to apply for entry to Britain. I might be accepted as a domestic, but who wants to be a domestic in England? Certainly not I. Before the war I would have welcomed the opportunity, but nothing can change my plans now. Czechoslovakia will open its doors fairly soon and I must return. Pavel also asks me to send my old passport for renewal to the Czech consulate in London and this seems a wiser suggestion. It is important to be up to date. At the end of his letter he mentions an English engineer friend who plans to visit Madrid. His name is Leslie Porter and Pavel hopes I will be able to show him around.

Mr. Zeman tells me the Red Cross is so overworked, it will take a long time to locating the displaced people in the many concentration camps. I am very impatient, but there is no news of my family.

September 20, 1945

Miguel is dead! These cruel words on paper stare into my face. I thought I had no more tears to shed, yet I cannot hold them back.

The letter from Castillo came so unexpectedly and hit me like thunder out of blue sky. Miguel died of pneumonia, a short illness that liberated him from long sufferings. Dear, poor Miguel. Henceforth I will be able to discard the haunting image of Miguel in a wheelchair. Instead the restored picture of him, exuberant with health and vigor, will remain in my heart for ever.

Castillo's sister, Miguel's long-time secretary, found while cleaning out his office, a bundle containing all my letters, and sent me them, tracing my address through the Irigoyens. Miguel, bless him, had neatly tied them with a white silk ribbon. All carried the same French and Spanish postmarks from the day the mail service was re-established after the end of the war. Yet they were assembled in chronological order. So, they had reached Miguel, after all! I could not resist the temptation of reading them, including the arlier ones penned in an awkward, almost childlike language, yet tender and full of love. Afterwards I gathered one letter after another, struck a match and watched them devoured one at a time by the dancing flame, the thin rising smoke accompanied by my loving farewell wishes.

October 10, 1945

Leslie Porter called this morning and we arranged to meet after dinner at his hotel. His voice is strong and sonorous. It does not match Pavel's description of an ugly face.

I wondered how I would recognize him, after all there are many ugly faces around us.

Well, there was no mistaking him. When he who got up from his chair, reddish-blond hair, towering over everybody else in the hall, lanky in his badly wrinkled suit, I knew he had to be an Englishman.

My hand disappeared in both of his. I thought he never would let loose. Pavel was right. He is ugly, but talking with him I forgot his looks. I cannot pin down what his attraction is. Perhaps it is a virile protection he emanates. As I contemplated his face I thought I detected in his eyes a trace of an old hurt. I felt compassion but no curiosity to know why. We had a couple of drinks, then visited a Flamenco nightclub.

We had a pleasant evening, but the performance was loud, and there was little opportunity for conversation.

Leslie is selling mining machines to an import house in Madrid, at the same time installing them up north in Asturias. He'll be going back and forth for quite some time, I suppose. He has a knack of communicating with people without knowing a word of Spanish. I don't know how he does it.

News from the Red Cross. Milan had been in Theresienstadt managing the pharmacy. The small town was a collecting point for Jews before they were sent to various concentration camps. When Auntie Mathilde was selected for Auschwitz in Poland, he insisted on accompanying her. No further information at this time. The dead eyes of the living skeletons I saw in the pictures at the Embassy are haunting me.

October 25, 1945

Leslie came back from Oviedo and called me right away, anxious to dance, something I haven't done in years. We danced in the "Casa Blanca." a large nightclub with removable ceiling. In summer one dances under star light, now crystal chandeliers cast glittering lights onto the dance parquet. At the first sound of music Leslie led me to the revolving dance floor.

"You know, you have an unpronouncable name," he said when we were on the dance floor, and gently pulled me toward his chest. He towered over me and my nose was constantly rubbing on the buttons of his waistcoat.

Holding me tighter, he asked: "Do you mind if I call you 'ducky'?"

I smiled. The music stopped and we returned to the table and sipped our cognac. He beamed back at me.

"So, does being a governess satisfy you?"

"Certainly not, but in case you didn't know it, I'm trying to survive."

"That's very brave and commendable. But the war is over and I'm sure you have other qualities you could use to build up a better existence, a survivor like you shouldn't have it too difficult."

"Well, so far I owe it to the Bradshaws. After all, they practically pulled me out of the gutter, so to speak."

"Alright, but soon they'll be returning to the States. You're not going with them, are you?"

"No, I haven't made any plans yet. Besides, I'm anxious to return to Czechoslovakia."

"Don't kid yourself. That could take months or even years. The Western democracies have to find urgent solutions to the problems created by the vacuum in central Europe."

He packed his pipe and took a few deep pulls, continuing in a relaxed way. "After Germany's defeat there was a chaos of disintegrating societies. The millions of homeless, displaced people, children who without any direction are still wandering aimlessly in the ruins. They are the priority and we must find shelter for them. We also have to create law and order, re-educate whole nations. This is not done in one day. You are the last responsibility, my dear little Ducky."

He was right, of course, but I didn't want to admit it—not even to myself. I had not considered it in such a macroscopic way, but rather from my egocentric and simplistic point of view.

"But let's not forget why we are here," he exclaimed, getting up and pulling me to the dance floor again. "This is not the place for such a

conversation."

He held me tightly while dancing. His strong hands on my back electrified me. Strange sparks ran through my body. His masculine fragrance of tobacco and cologne filled my nostrils. It felt so good to be held by strong arms, I thought. Heavens, watch out! I said to myself. Bah, he will be gone in a few days—there is no danger. Besides he's not the type who can seduce me either.

November 8, 1945

Leslie wanted to introduce me to the British-American Club. A few people sat around but most stood at the bar. I didn't like it there, perhaps because I felt I didn't belong. Leslie sensed it.

"Why should I seek out the British in Madrid—I have enough of them at home," he laughed.

When I arrived home Patty was sitting in the salon looking intently at an art volume.

"Have you finished your homework?" I asked.

"Yes," she said with a red face, trying to hide the book.

"What are you reading here?" I asked.

"Nothing, nothing. Zdenka, come to my room, I'll show you the lesson." Intrigued, I grabbed the book. It was of pornographic pictures by Russian artists. I was shocked—not by the drawings—but by my dilemma. Should I report it to her parents? I decided quickly to put it aside and ignore it. Later, I told Mrs. Bradshaw that I had seen the book on the table and that it might be advisable to lock it up before Patty got her hands on it.

"Oh, my husband must have forgotten to put it away," she said.

November 15, 1945

Leslie called me early.

"Can you get away from your girl? I'm dying to see the Escorial, one of the eight wonders of the world. Come with me. I have a car for the day."

Mrs. Bradshaw gave me her blessing and after an hour's drive through the yellow and red landscape of Castille, we reached the Escorial, in its monumental splendor at the foot of the Guadarrama mountains. We wandered hand in hand from one hall to another.

"A clever man, that Philip II," remarked Leslie. "He built his home, church, memorial and tomb under one roof. It's admirable what conception of space and architecture those builders had in the Sixteenth century." When we finally emerged from the subterranean tumbs of the Spanish kings I was glad.

The sun had finally broken through to gild the granite rocks. Yellow-golden chestnut leaves glistened on the damp earth. The sadness I had felt inside left me and Leslie, sensing a change of mood, laughingly cried: "It is getting late, let's eat something."

Once in the restaurant, he confided: "I have a job for you. The office I deal with in Madrid needs a bilingual secretary—they can't find anybody who knows English."

"That's beautiful Leslie, but I don't know English either. I don't know how to type and I cannot take dictation."

"Don't be a defeatist before you've tried. Your English is sufficient and the rest you'll learn on the job.

"But Leslie ..." I panicked.

"No buts! As soon as you can, you'll go to Mr. Teixeira who owns

the Company. I'll talk to him about you." Driving back many thoughts raced through my mind. What are my accomplishments? What had I done with my life? Nothing I could show. Survive? This is not enough indeed. I sighed. From time to time Leslie glanced at me furtively. He spoke again.

"Soon I'll be going back. I'd like to think I'd done a good deed—it will make my life happier. Keep your chin up, Ducky, it's only half as bad." I envied his confidence in himself. No wonder he was a successful man.

"You are a cheerful chap, Leslie. You must have a happy home." How little did I know about him, I thought, yet I felt I had known him for a long time. Although his eyes were on the road I saw his face change. I even felt his body stiffen.

"Frankly, it is that of an ordinary businessman who works eighteen hours a day. Nothing more and nothing less." I understood he did not want to talk about it and was puzzled about his reluctance. Maybe it is better that I don't know more about him.

Mr. Bradshaw returned from his office with a long Red Cross telegram for me, which I took to my room. It read:

> In our search for your brother, Dr. Milan Vagner, we have come upon Vera Novotna, from Brno, who claims to be his fiancée. She was in contact with him throughtout the war while he was in the concentration camp. On January 20, the Russians entered the concentration camp of Auschwitz. From his first detention camp of Theresienstadt he was transported to the camp of Treblinka where he worked in an amunition factory. Allied bombardments made the factory unsafe and he was finally transferred to Auschwitz. Niss Novotna was able, once in a while, to smuggle into the camp food parcels and received also some news from him. He may have been one of the few survivors whom the Germans, at the approach of the Russian Army, chased out into the snowfields where he most probably perished. Should we receive more details we shall inform you.

Again I see the haunting pictures of the half-dead bodies. Why didn't

anybody do something about it? My nights are tormented and I cannot sleep. Did he survive? Oh Lord, make him come home.

December 1, 1945

I talked to Leslie about my brother and the eye-opening experience at the Embassy when they showed the pictures.

"We heard in England about the atrocities. How come you were so ignorant?"

"In France the Germans obviously kept it a secret and if the French knew about it they certainly did not mention it. And Franco, as their ally, would be on his guard too."

I received a letter via the American Embassy from Vera Novotna. She is convinced Milan is alive—perhaps in Russia, trying to return. Many do come back. She searches and interrogates every man who returns, so far with no result. She is still very much in love with him. In 1939 she was not free to marry him and she was the reason for his reluctance to leave.

December 12, 1945

Mr. Teixeira's office is in the center of town near the Palace Hotel. He is Portuguese and a charming man in his early forties. I told him I had no office experience and that my English was poor.

"Oh, I am sure it is good enough. Mr. Porter had nothing but praise for you. As to your experience, I'm sure you will learn fast." I was hired on a half-day basis, starting January 2nd.

Leslie was intent on celebrating what he called my entrance into the business world.

"It's only half the business world," I reminded him. "I'll have to find a second job to pay the rent of a room."

"You will manage, Ducky, I'm sure." Leslie looked at me in a way a proud father would at his son that just had graduated.

After dinner at the impressive Palace Hotel, we moved on to the Gitana flamenco night club.

"I leave tomorrow. What message can I give Pavel?" The mention of his departure was unexpected and I had to consider what to say.

"Tell him I have no desire to come to England. I want to find my brother. Besides, I think I am not welcome in England. Do you remember when Czechoslovakia was abandoned, and according to your Chamberlain, no more than 'a distant land of which we know little.'"

"Yes, I do remember and that's why I want to make up for it," Leslie interrupted me in a serious tone.

We watched the Flamenco dancers in their polka-dotted costumes, until it was late.

We walked to his hotel, and at the door he put his arm around my shoulder and moved with me into the elevator. I did not resist. I don't know what his thoughts were but I know I had stopped thinking. Taking off my clothes, his hands caressed me gently. His love-making was not just a simple sex act but an expression of love. He unbolted deep feelings, not like the sudden outburst of a volcano but rather an expression of infinite tenderness. It was the fulfillment of desire that had lain dormant for a long time waiting for the right lover to awaken it.

On our way home we were silent, not wanting to break the magic of having found each other. At the door he held me with his eyes as if wanting to engrave my face deeply into his memory. He kissed me on my eyelids while stroking my hair.

I used the service entrance, not wanting to disturb anyone or be seen

so late in the morning. At breakfast I had a telephone call.

"Is it you, Ducky, darling? I'm at the airport. I want you to know that you've made my life worth living again. Thankyou." And he hung up.

December 18, 1945

The Bradshaws have left. As diplomats they are used to frequent changes and I'm sure they refrain from strong attachments. It was a farewell for them with the gratifying anticipation of going home. Nobody shed tears. Thanking each other for everything we separated with good wishes. Their mind was busy with future plans. I was preoccupied with the thoughts of how to restructure my life. Of course, I will miss Patty of whom I had grown fond.

December 20, 1945

I have selected a very modest room in the Pension Nicolasa, in the center of town, near the office. The room, containing just an iron bed, an armoire, one chair and a small table, remind me of my first one in St. Jean. There is one common bathroom for all borders. The stone floor is bare and cold. But Señora Niccolasa, a Basque woman, is very friendly and prepares delicious meals for her tenants.

December 26, 1945

Christmas was a flat affair. Everything in town was closed. Marina stayed with her American family. Bedra left for a rest in warmer climes, to Torremolinos, a fishing village on the Mediterranean.

"I wish I could go with you, but I have more important things to do. I am starting a new life again."

"Good luck—I know you'll succeed."

"Your words in God's ear," I replied.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

January 4, 1946

Well I started, though it was a disappointingly slow start. At 9 o'clock sharp I was at the door of the office in Calle Cervantes. Nobody came before 9:30. Finally a man arrived who turned out to be Mr. Paniagua, the bookkeeper. While he opened all the connecting doors and shutters, a girl—his assistant—ambled in. Mr. Gomez, the manager, joined them at about 10 o'clock with Mr. Teixeira. A long ceremony of introductions followed. I was shown a typewriter on a small desk and a file cabinet and left alone. For the rest of the morning I practiced my rusty typing and studied a file of letters from the Mining Machine Company in England. Later in the morning Mr. Teixeira brought me a draft of a letter to be translated and typed in English. I struggled but managed, after several false starts, to turn out a decent letter. Of course, I am not sure the receivers will understand it. If nothing else, they might be amused by it. My boss reassures me with a smile: "Let them write in Spanish if they don't like our letters."

January 30, 1946

Already I'm an old timer. Everything is running smoothly, though it's hardly a demanding job. However, I had to overcome other difficulties, such as entering restaurants alone. The office, in the heart of town, is surrounded by eating places. I scouted around and discovered most of them to be out of my range, but finally found a few—simple tascas with rowdy

customers—with cheap food.

On one of my expeditions I ran into Joan Carter, an English girl I'd met before at the British-American Club. Joan is very pretty, with a beautiful figure. She towers over me and her walk exudes confidence. She is a kind, soft-spoken and well-rounded person. We had a lot to talk about. During the war she was in the service and now works for British European Airways. She had lived in Spain before the war, was greatly interested in the culture, and getting reaquainted with it.

February 16, 1946

I moved into a new room beneath Joan, on the Plaza de las Cortes. Señora Nicolasa accepted my notice with grace, offering me a farewell dinner of gazpacho and paella. She even gave me the recipe for both.

I share the bathroom with another young couple. The view is into a small patio and onto windows from the opposite house. Since the rent in the new pension is higher, I have to cut down on food. I meet Joan for lunch, our meals consisting mostly of potatoes with lots of gravy. Once in a while we discover some meat hidden under the potatoes. Sundays we squander on the ubiquitous paella—mostly rice, colored with safran.

"You don't have to eat with me in these dinky taverns," I told Joan. "You can afford better."

"I know, but I'd rather spend the money on cigarettes," she admitted laughingly.

After a silence she asked:

"Does the question of survival worry you?"

"Oh no. After all, I don't consider it a permanent situation, more a fill-in, so to speak, between war and peace. Besides, having been a few times in life or death situations, I am aware of my mortality. Things like

jobs, meager earnings or even hunger, become secondary. And I'm far away from being hungry."

March 1, 1946

I am trying for a second job at the Palace Hotel. It never would have occurred to me, but my low income forces me to be aggressive. Mr. Rolland, one of the French managers there, was very friendly and encouraging, and will get back to me. In Mr. Teixeira's office I sometimes have problems with translations of technical descriptions of machines. I still think someone with an engineering background would be more appropriate, but if Mr. Teixeira is satisfied I won't worry.

March 7, 1946

A letter from Pavel. He is disappointed that I don't want to live in England, but he understands. Between the lines I read that he is worried again, dear old Pavel! I wish he would find a girl, get married and worry about his own family.

He was in London recently and met Leslie.

"He didn't say much about his stay in Madrid or about you," the letter read. "I hope you were nice to him, though I can't imagine you had turned off your innate charm. He seemed to me changed for the better. Heaven knows he has reason to be unhappy. His wife ran away a year ago and left him with a paraplegic child. She was a tramp, though perhaps I shouldn't be too harsh, all that happened after some terrible bombing, the child's accident and the general sufferings in the war. He never complained, nor did he accept any help from me during his crisis. I'm very fond of him. He is one of those rare men who accept hard luck without complaint. I think he has now regained his balance. His work and the weekly visits to his child,

now in an institution, absorb him completely."

After reading this, I sat immersed in my thoughts about Leslie. It was good we hadn't talked about our pasts. We accepted one another as we were then, uninhibited enjoying our passion of the moment.

Pavel's letter touched me strangely. Dear, poor Leslie. My first impulse was to write him, but this might destroy our remembrance of a beautiful dream. The letter brought Leslie back to me. I felt his warmth and magnetic presence, his luminous grey eyes scrutinizing me. I even heard his voice: "See, Ducky, other people suffer too!" I thought of cold, distant England across the Channel, having denied access to an expatriate, and Leslie not a free man. This, and my burning desire to return to my beloved homeland and search for my brother, seemed reason enough for not allowing a budding love to grow. In that instant I felt this was the true moment of our "good byes."

March 10, 1946

Today was my lucky day. Monsieur Rolland hired me as his part-time afternoon secretary. For the time being, his budget doesn't allow him to employ me full-time, nor is there enough work. He told me the man who makes the most money there is the doorman—the whistle is his sword. His tips are immense, the food and uniform are free. "I have to buy my own tuxedo," he added with a wry smile.

I received another letter from Vera Novotna. "I know he is alive—I feel it in my heart," she writes. "People are returning all the time." She asks when I shall go back. I wish I knew. My passport is still with the Consulate in London.

May 20, 1946

I found yet another job, with the Federation of Nautic Clubs.

I start at 3 o'clock and leave at seven. My boss is a lawyer who dictates letters in the most beautiful Spanish and I am learning a lot. He is very kind and patient with me. After work I often meet Joan for a drink. We used to meet in the Cafe Chicote before we learned it was a pick-up place.

Once in a while I meet with a group of foreigners—a German girl with her Spanish boyfriend, two Hungarians, an Austrian and a Czech woman. In a way it reminds me of the days in Paris when we were all downcast, trying to make plans we knew were futile. Yet our gatherings here are different. Although the fear of Nazi persecution is no more written on their faces, the appearance of these new-found friends discloses still much uncertainty. Wary of leaving Europe to start new lives, they recoil at the idea of returning to ruins and hostile fatherland. Only the Czech girl can tell a different story. I brought her to this group because I did not know what else to do with her. Answering a plea for help from Mrs. Zeman, I agreed to meet Milada from Prague. She doesn't know a word of Spanish and is completely helpless.

Milada's is a particularly sorry tale. In Prague, with the war still raging, she had met and fallen in love with a Spaniard, fighting in Franco's Division Azul, a battalion of volunteers sent to help Germany against the Russians. They were married, and Milada lost her Czech citizenship, automatically assuming her husband's. When they returned together to Spain, however, she discovered he was already married with three children. In Catholic Spain divorce is impossible. Besides I don't think he wants a divorce. The authorities do not recognize the marriage and stripped her of her Spanish citizenship. Mr. Zeman is doing all he can, meanwhile. Having given everything to her "husband," Milada is both paperless and penniless.

How many more strange war stories will come to light?

July 1, 1946

My three jobs begin to dissatisfy me and I am trying hard to find just one that pays enough to support me. Women's salaries are extremely low and foreign languages are not in demand.

I am still without my passport. Apparently the Consulate in London sent it on to Prague where they have more important things to do.

My old friend Misha discovered my whereabouts and wrote, overjoyed that I survived. In London he had obtained a visa for Argentina where he now makes a lucrative living. He was sorry to hear of all my trouble caused by his telegram / sent to me in St. Jean at the beginning of the war. The sad story is that nothing had helped his friends who both disappeared and presumably perished. He describes Argentina as a great country full of wonderful opportunities. He has become a rich man again and suggests I consider moving to Argentina. "Should you be interested to come I promise to obtain a visa for you. After all, I owe you a favor."

July 8, 1946

The other evening I attended a concert with Joan, in the Retiro in a cypress grove,——forming a natural amphitheater. It was the perfect moonlit background for Tschaikovsky's fifth symphony. A spellbinding experience.

July 15, 1946

Mr. Teixeira invited me for dinner at his home. He introduced his mustachioed Portuguese wife and a throng of children. The dinner was exquisite and the family charming, but in the car on the drive home, he made advances, at one stage stopping the car and trying to kiss me. How do you defend yourself against a boss'es advances? I fought him off and he seemed crushed. The next day at work, I was embarrassed, but he behaved as if nothing had happened. Aren't men strange?

August 1, 1946

The fearful heat has started again. To fight it Joan and I swim in

a pool near the Manzanares river.

"A beautiful name for such a poor waterless river," Joan remarked.

"I guess he lost a slow battle with the heat, but instead of water you see plenty of rusty pots and broken glass," I replied.

After one swim we visited the women-only solarium on the second floor. Seeing them completely naked, we were initially embarrassed but then took our swimsuits off. Still the women stared at us. I wondered if it was out of admiration for Joan's beautiful body, like carved marble. Later we learned that the solarium is visited only by the city's whores, so that was the end of our sun tanning. Next, Joan persuaded me to visit a fortune teller. The old woman celebrated locally for her accurate predictions, lived in the Calle Toledo—a poor neighborhood of humble shacks and neglect. Joan learned she would soon marry, while I was to make a big trip, not back to Czechoslovakia, but to California of all places. "Watch out," she warned, "Don't go, or you will die there." Why would I want to go to California?

The heat is relentless. Life in the streets is at a standstill between one and 5 o'clock. Beggars with holes in their soles and little hope in their hearts, stand on corners holding out their hands silently.

The offices are unbearable. Before starting work, my boss at Nautic prepares a cool drink, mixing anisette liqueur with ice and soda water, and calls it "Palomita." It tastes like absynthe but is thirst-quenching. After work I meet Joan in one of the garden cafés on the Castellana. We have learned to use our Spanish fans gracefully. The nights are equally hot and sticky. Trying to sleep is useless. Even cold showers don't help. I spend half the night talking to a young Frenchman across from my window. Pierre is a beautiful specimen, part artist, part businessman. He is homosexual,

but I am glad, since it makes our friendship less restrained.

September 1, 1946

A wonderful day's excursion with Pierre to the famed city of Toledo. We drove the seventy kilometers in his old car, the back seats crammed with his easel, rolled up canvases and boxes of paint tubes. Two-wheel carts harnessed with patient donkeys stood on crossroads. I was thrilled to see real life storks standing on one leg in their nests on top of a roof or chimney. The landscape varied from a few dirty, dejected-looking gray stone villages to golden wheatfields and pastoral slopes. The closer we got to Toledo, the redder the earth appeared. Pierre talked about his job and his travels. Then we discussed books. He reads a lot of modern Spanish literature, especially on his business trips, and mentioned Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset, and Fernandez Florez. I remembered one book Miguel had given me.

"Could you lend me one of Fernandez Florez' books?" I asked. "I think his humor is delightful."

"I don't have any books."

I looked at him, puzzled.

"Well, I don't want to be burdened with them. So as soon as I finish one page I tear it up and throw it out of the train window."

Toledo was a dream. Perched on a promontory the town is surrounded on three sides by the deep gorge dug by the River Tagus. I left Pierre by its banks where he set up his easel attempting to transfer the view to canvas. When I entered one of the many city gates I was surrounded not only by Moorish past but by Moslem, Christian and Jewish cultural remnants. I climbed narrow empty streets, past cracked and crumbling medieval houses, with red-tiled roofs and small balconies serving as hanging lofts for laundry. I looked into the cool patios and atriums of patrician houses filled with

flowers and ornate wrought ironwork. I fell under the Toledo spell. In my imagination I saw beautiful velvet-clad señoras on the staircases. A special magic was in the air and I lost myself in day dreams of by-gone times.

Entering an old Jewish synagoge I felt a mystic power emanating from the walls. I sat in the cathedral before El Greco's "The Burial of Count Orgaz," studying the long drawn-out faces.

Later I dined with Pierre in a tavern garden overlooking the low and muddy Tagus, rolling along slowly in the sun, its banks steep and bare. The magnificent view took in the half-demolished Alcazar, the massive fortress that had withstood the siege of 1936. The window panes of Toledo caught the last rays of the vanishing sun and threw them back like burning sparks. The sound of innumerable bells filled the silence. It was time to leave.

Pierre's painting of Toledo didn't overly impress me, especially after seeing those by El Greco. I hope he won't insist on painting me.

October 12, 1946

Monsieur Rolland has bought a hotel in Tangiers and asks whether I would work for him there. The offer is tempting, and above all, flattering, but though Tangiers sounds a romantic place, I declined. Nothing else can lure me as much as going back home. Still I wait for my passport.

November 1, 1946

What an episode! I was told of an English guest at the hotel who needed somebody to take dictation.

Armed with my writing pad, I knocked at his door. "Mr. Bower?" I introduced myself to a heavy set, shall we say, 'older man' who sat at a table strewn with papers and file folders. He rose with difficulty from his chair, put his arm around my shoulder and asked: "Shall we make love

now, or afterwards?"

It took me so much by surprise that I lost my head and fled from the room. I did not even wait for the elevator but ran down the stairs two at the time. Life is full of surprises!

December 15, 1946

During a visit to the British-American Club, I was introduced to an American, Mr. Brown, and his wife. He has just started an English-language newspaper in Madrid, similar to the New York Herald, and aimed at the rising influx of businessmen from Britain and America.

We spoke at length of the coming changes in Spain, life geared to multi-lingual talents to use in one good job, and prevailing chauvinism.

Mr. Brown dropped his bombshell: "I'll need somebody to sell advertising space in my paper. How about it? I think you might be the perfect person."

I was flabbergasted. "But I am shy and hate talking to strangers." He was not to be dissuaded.

"It's easy, and your asset is being a woman—attractive if I may say. An even greater advantage is you're a foreigner."

"Brownie, don't persuade her if she doesn't want to do it," Mrs. Brown interrupted, no doubt piqued by her husband's remarks.

Suddenly the challenge tempted me and despite misgivings, I said: "Well, I might try."

"Bravo, that's how I like my girl."

This time from Mrs. Brown I caught a wicked glare meant to kill!

January 5, 1947

So Mr. Brown is training me in the deceptive arts of salesmanship and promises me a good percentage of each ad sold. With only two sales I

would make more money than a month's present salary.

With trepidation I made my first call at the Banco de España. I was lucky and sold the manager a full page. Next was an import business. Another one was a Swiss watch importer, who even offered me a job in Zurich!

March 9, 1947

Hallelujah! My renewed passport finally arrived today. Now nothing can hold me back. Czechoslovakia, here I come!

A second letter was from Misha. He asks me to send copies of my personal documents so he can submit them to the Argentine immigration office. Well, if he insists, he can have them, though I have no intention of going there.

What a fiasco! The French won't issue me a transit visa unless I have a visa for Czechoslovakia. Same goes for Switzerland. But the Czechs don't issue visas to their own subjects since they are free to return. It is a vicious circle!

For travel through the allied occupied zones one needs permits which can theoretically be obtained at their consulates. But there is no Russian consulate here. The permit for the American zone is obtainable only in Paris, and how do I get there?

Mrs. Zeman had some worldly words of advice: "Zdenka dear, I considered you more enterprising. Put on your prettiest dress and makeup, go to the French Consulate and insist on seeing the Consul in person. He is young, new in his job here, and most probably susceptible to pretty young women!"

Well it worked! I obtained a five day transit visa for France and

now I don't know where to start. There are so many things to organize. To satisfy Misha, I sent him copies of the few documents I possess. I even went to the Argentine Consulate and filled out countless questionnaires. Bedra, who broke all ties with Czechoslovakia, feels I am making a mistake. Marcelle seems to have come to her senses and is also thinking of her future which, of course, is in Paris rather than Calle Serrano. Marina went back to San Sebastian for Easter and got stuck there with a burst appendix. Antonio paid her daily visits and surprised her with a declaration of love. The marriage ceremony took place actually in the hospital. What a romantic setting!

May 3, 1947

Mr. Brown proudly showed me the first issue of his newspaper. I, too, felt a certain satisfaction, heightened by the pay check. It's future looks promising and I gave notice in my other jobs. I wrote to Michelle in Paris and had a quick letter in return with a warm invitation to stay with her. Since the untimely death of her mother she and Papa Arbide have moved from Montmartre to the rue Fbg. St. Honoré, across from the British Embassy. Michelle writes: "The memories in the old place were too oppressive— Mama's happy laughter gone for ever. Papa is not yet reconciled to being alone. There is plenty of room for you to stay as long as you wish. I don't think you made the right choice wanting to go back home, but we will have plenty of time to talk it over. Your friend Franta has returned to Paris with a good deal of information about the situation in your country."

Misha wrote announcing his marriage. Otherwise he has bad news for me. The Argentine government, before it will issue a visa, requires a certificate of baptism. Without one, they rejected my application. So,

that is that!

I visited Ines, whose father had just arrived from Argentina. I mentioned Misha's bad news regarding a visa, and Mr. Vergara-Pardo thinks he may be able to help me—he has some influence, although frankly I care little one way or the other.

Now, all I need to is pack, buy a train ticket, and say 'Goodbye' to everybody. Madrid was good to me. I leave here good friends and indelible memories to embellish my future life.

With two suitcases packed with books and one bursting with clothes, I wonder how I'll negotiate the transfer at the border. What a difference from my arrival five years ago with nothing but what I carried on my body. Though it taught me to live with very little, I still can't resist collecting worldly goods.

They all came to wish me farewell. Good wishes, laughter and tears until the whistle train sounded. Their last words echoed in my ears: "We hope you find your brother!" I sighed and settled into my seat. Am I really going home?

CHAPTER TWELVE

Paris

Tumultuous thoughts race through my mind. To be in Paris again is hard to deal with. The reminiscences are overwhelming. But, first of all, the reunion with Michelle. Papa Arbide shows the painful loss of his wife. He is definitely not the same. We are all up half the night in endless conversations. Shopping together at the nearby market is a new experience for me. Coffee-houses have disappeared and new ones have sprung up. Walls everywhere still show the signs of war—store windows have holes and spider-like cracks.

Out of curiosity I visited our old place on Avenue Junot. Nobody I knew was there. Strange faces ogled me.

"Stay with us," Michelle pleaded. "It's much too soon to go back."

"But I only have a five-day permit," I reminded them.

"This could be arranged," they reassured me.

May 10, 1947

So, at Michelle's urging, I got an extension of my stay. At first it seemed impossible, but at Papa's suggestion I folded two one hundred franc bills into my passport when I submitted it at the Prefecture.

May 13, 1947

Today I met Franta. He arrived recently from Algiers, accompanied by his younger brother Petr. It was a joyful reunion with many stories to tell.

"Under no circumstances should you return to Czechoslovakia," he warned. "It will be ages before your properties are returned. Your bank accounts were transferred to Germany and you may never see them again. The situation is very unstable."

"I'm sure I'll quickly find a job."

"Listen, Zdenka, I know many persons in high places in the government and have inside information," Petr added. Better wait. In the first place, the differences there will be devastating and, second, you have lived away for so long, your old friends and family are gone. You will be very unhappy, I'm sure."

"Then I will come back here, or perhaps return to Spain."

"You're a dreamer. Your passport is valid for only a short time and the Czechs won't renew it. Nor will they give you a new one. I know that, believe me. So, think it over before you undertake a step you will certainly regret."

Deep in my heart I knew he was right, but to give up a plan I had worked on so long was too hard.

"What if Milan comes back and I am not there?"

"You are in Brno within twelve hours and if you take a plane you are there in no time." His logic convinced me and I resigned myself to fate.

June 1, 1947

Paris is stifling. Most of my time is spent shuttling around government offices. They say that if I can get a job contract I will receive a working permit which would be an opener for the residence permit.

There are jobs available but, according to the rules, I have to offer a skill a French person does not have. I scanned the newspapers and

found an import business in need of a secretary. Monsieur Delacroix, a short, fat man, bald with a head like a bowling ball, was impressed with me, and assured me my knowledge of so many languages would cover the skill requirement. He was anxious to get me started.

The salary seems adequate, though the office on the Boulevard St. Germain is shabby and depressing. In spite of Michelle's objections I looked at many available rooms for rent and found them unacceptable, so I decided, for the time being, to remain with the Arbides.

Dreadful news from the Red Cross:

"We regret to inform you that there is no trace to be found of your brother, Dr. Milan Vagner. We assume he has perished, therefore are terminating our search."

I was stunned. My blind confidence through all the war years that I would reunite with my family, is gone. The hopes that had so often given me the strength to survive are shattered with one stroke. What further expectations can I have? My only brother, emaciated and tormented, chased out into the snowfields, and the rest of my family gassed. What feelings remain in me? My belief in God has vanished. Why did He allow such suffering of innocent people? Milan, who had spent his first twenty-five years studying, had to perish in the most cruel manner without ever harvesting the seeds sown so carefully. He was the better person of the two of us. Why he and not I? I have no answer. My guilt will haunt me to the end of my life.

I am turning my back on my country. There is nothing left that would make me wish to return. The ghosts of the past would only torment me.

June 16, 1947

The metro-ride to work is long. The office is a dark room with small windows reaching only two feet up from the floor. If I bend down, I have a view of a high wall. The backlog of work is overwhelming but keeps me away from personal thoughts. Papers and folders are strewn all over the floor, and cabinets and shelves are stuffed with clippings and more paper. It will take months and more than one secretary to create any order from this chaos.

June 30, 1947

A telegram was waiting when I arrived home. What a surprise! It read: Your immigration visa arrived. Would advise you return to Madrid. Signed: Vergara-Pardo.

I was stupefied. The Argentine visa had been the last thing in my mind.

"What will you do?" Michelle queried. Her voice sounded fearful. "You are not going to Argentina, are you?"

"I don't know, Michelle—it comes so suddenly. I never considered it seriously."

"Well, you don't have to decide now—there is plenty of time."

"Apparently not." Feverishly I started to think. How can I make such a weighty decision!

During the night I tossed and turned. Here in Paris I will always be a foreigner with no rights, depending on governmental whims. Emigrating to Argentina I will be a legal immigrant and could even become a citizen if I wished. But the thought of leaving Europe haunts me. Such an irrevocable step would be painful, but might be may salvation, starting a new life on a new continent and leaving behind all sad memories. Isn't

this a wonderful chance? Caramba, Zdenka, grab it, don't you see how God tends out to you His helping hands?

"Michelle, dear," I greeted her in the morning, "I'm going!" I said it with such vehemence she did not try to dissuade me.

"You are a brave girl," Papa Arbide stated admiringly. "I really think you made the right choice."

"Just when I was looking forward to an everlasting friendship with you, you are abandoning me," Michelle expressed her disappointment. "But I do understand your motives so well." I bit my lips and fought back my tears. If only Argentina were not at the end of the world.

July 10, 1947

More packing. Among the belongings Madame Lafargue had returned from St. Jean was the handwritten journal from my days in France. Reading on the cover the deceiving title "Recipes," I could not refrain from a gentle smile.

Madrid again! My visa was at the Argentine Embassy, together with an airline ticket from Misha. I greeted my friends with hello and good bye, thanking Mr. Vergara-Pardo, who explained the urgency of his telegram.

"I obtained the visa from one minister, but was warned of frequent sudden changes in the cabinet with resulting cancellations of old decrees."

Mr. Teixeira gave me glowing introductions to his business friends in Buenos Aires. "If you are coming through Lisbon, I'll be in Estoril for a few days. Give me a call at the Hotel Palacio and we could have dinner."

July 18, 1947

Everything started rolling with frightening speed. My emotions are

in upheaval. At last I am sitting in the airplane to Lisbon. What a strange feeling to be in this gigantic bird. Am I so exhausted that I lost my fear?

Lisbon. The flight was short. KLM airlines provide luxury accommodation for the night in Estoril. I took a short sight-seeing tour of Lisbon, then met Mr. Teixeira for an exquisite dinner of Portuguese delicacies and animated conversation.

"What are you planning to do in Buenos Aires?" he asked.

"I really don't know. I hope to find a job soon."

"Do you have family there?"

"No."

"I don't want to appear curious, but do you have any money?"

"No." He looked at me in visible amazement then pulled several bank notes from his wallet and tended them towards me matter-of-factly.

"It is not a fortune, but will help you over the first days and a telegram asking for more."

"Mr. Teixeira, I can't accept this. And how would I ever be able to return you the money?"

"Should your conscience bother you and you have enough money left, buy me a subscription to 'The Golfer.'"

Lisbon Airport was busy, and the thought of leaving Europe—my Europe—for an unknown continent started to choke me. The immensity of this enterprise dwarfed me and I cringed in my seat. Buenos Aires was my destination and that was all I knew. Wasn't it foolish to leave so unprepared? Of course it was. I fell asleep and woke up in Dakar, our first stop. What

a surprise! The heat was suffocating.

Then on to Recife where a banquet was awaiting us, before the final leg of the trip. Airborne again, I continued to have disturbing thoughts, still agonizing over my momentous decision. Finally I decided I could neither return nor jump out of the plane.

We flew over Rio, an unforgettable sight, finally, landing in Montevideo, Uruguay, where I had to take a boat since KLM has no landing permit for Buenos Aires.

In a small cabin with a tiny porthole and a very uncomfortable cot, I slept uninterruptedly, exhausted from the long flight. It was 8 in the morning when the throbbing engines stopped and the sudden silence woke me up. In the rising mist I glimpsed the sky scrapers of Buenos Aires. Sky scrapers in South America! I didn't expect that.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

July 30, 1947

Buenos Aires

Our ship dropped anchor and started to unload. I was busy struggling with my cases, when I heard my name called.

"Misha," I yelled back, in disbelief. He was no more the boy I had last seen, but a heavy-set man, hardly recognizable. Should I also have changed so much, I pondered. We looked into each other's eyes trying to read the thoughts behind, keeping our unspoken words for ourselves.

"For a while I feared you wouldn't come but I'm sure you won't regret it." I didn't want to tell him that I had no illusions and wasn't expecting much The painful detachment from Europe was still too fresh in my mind.

"I made reservation for you in the Claridge Hotel, and hope you'll like it," he said.

"I'm sure I will. Misha, you have done for me more than I deserve. I don't know how I'll ever be able to pay it back."

"Nonsense. I owed it to you. Do you have any plans or ideas what you will be doing?"

"I'll be looking for a job right away—I have good letters of introduction," I answered.

"I'm sorry I can't take care of you as much as I would have liked. But I just came back from a trip to the United States and my wife and I are in the midst of installing ourselves."

"Don't worry, I'll manage."

"Don't hesitate to call if you need help in anything. Promise me."

"Sure, sure," I said, trying to sound unconcerned.

The hotel is in the center of town, luxurious and comfortable. Anxious to acquaint myself with my new home town I went strolling through avenues, bought a map of the city and discovered it was easy to orient myself. The wide avenues and boulevards go in the direction from the port, starting with number one, in blocks of hundred numbers. The narrower perpendicular streets are all one-way. It is a beautiful city. I cannot believe it. Tomorrow I want to explore more.

August 25, 1947

I woke up early and ordered breakfast by phone while still in bed, expecting it to take a long while to prepare. To my surprise there was a knock at the door after only a few minutes. I was even more surprised when a waiter deposited the tray on my bedside table. My embarrassment did not seem to disturb him.

I walked a few streets to the Casa Rosada (the Government Palace) and further to the Avenida 18 de Julio, the widest avenue in the world, very impressive. Back through a park where I rested on a bench and watched an old lady feed a large group of street cats. I passed statues, fountains, and monuments of heroes unknown to me. Everywhere I saw well dressed people, a pleasant surprise after war-torn Europe. Most unexpected was the absence of uniformed men, especially compared with Spain.

In the Calle Florida, whose stylish fashion and jewelry stores, and art galleries could easily compete with Paris, I suddenly stopped in front of a boutique, on the door of which in golden letters was the name "Vlasta." Nobody but Czechs would have this name. My curiosity was aroused. Thinking

I might at least have the opportunity to say a few words in my native tongue, I entered and saw first only some pieces of furniture, a couple of dresses on display and a few fashionable accessories. I peeped through a half-drawn curtain into a dressing room where a young woman stood before a mirror while another woman sat on the floor hemming her dress. When she stood up she looked into my direction and noticed me.

"Vlasta!" "Zdenka!" we yelled simultaneously. For a moment she stood transfixed, then we were in each other's arms.

"How did you come here? I thought you were dead and all our friends feared the same," she stuttered, while patting my body as though to ascertain that I wasn't a ghost. Her customer left and a deluge of questions followed. When we realised that it was impossible to answer them all intelligently we stopped and sat down, half crying, half laughing.

"Let's keep our life stories for later," Vlasta proposed, lighting a cigarette with shaky hands. When did you arrive? Where do you stay? And what are your plans?"

When I told her, she exlaimed: "You should have come here yesterday, immediately."

"But I didn't know you lived here and this is an extraordinarily lucky break. I saw your name at the door."

"Now, my dear, get packing quickly and return as fast as you can. I'll take you to our home in Olivos on the outskirts and you'll stay with us. Let me call Jiri—he will be thrilled."

"Guess who is here, standing in front of me?" she spluttered nervously. "Oh, silly, you'll never guess—Zdenka! Yes, Zdenka. If you don't believe me, talk to her."

"Hello Jiri, yes it really is I. You'll believe it when you see me!"

On the drive through the suburbs, Vlasta pointed out a large mansion surrounded by high walls. "This is Peron's villa." She stopped at the next corner in front of a small chalet with a huge garden.

"Here we are—this is our modest abode."

"Well, you haven't been doing too badly," I said admiringly.

It is a small but compact house with plenty of atmosphere. Each room is furnished charmingly and the upstairs guestroom looks out on a swimming pool and lots of trees.

When Jiři came home we had a drink and dinner, then settled down to answer thousands of questions. It took hours, of course, with only half the stories told.

"Another day," I finally said, exhausted after so much talk. With the singed cinder smell of a mosquito repellent filling the room with a pleasant smell, I fell asleep feeling as I haven't felt for a long time.

In the morning, at coffee, Vlasta, brimming with energy, declared her plans.

"Listen you two, first of all I want to give a big party. Zdenka, you should meet all our old friends from Brno—and there are quite a few—and our new ones. You have lived long enough in isolation."

"Of course, quite right," Jiři said and turned to me. "I'm also sure everybody is anxious to meet you again and hear your stories."

September 12, 1947

Vlasta and Jiři get up very early, no time for breakfast—just a cup of coffee. Jiři goes to his office in the heart of town and Vlasta likes to be in her boutique before the employees arrive. I accompany them but leave them at their work and acquaint myself with the city. I am overwhelmed by the new construction and beauty. The city seems to have adopted, on the

one hand, the American way of life with its modern technology and, on the other, the amenities of central European leisurely elegance. I am enchanted to be here. And then come the magic evenings, warm and mysterious. Darkness sets in suddenly, bringing to life a myriad of chattering cicadas from the neighboring pampas. Heavy scent from semi-tropical plants fills the air. The innumerable stars seem more brilliant than in Europe and are dominated by the fascinating Southern Cross. A special spell here captures my imagination. Social life at weekends takes place on quintas of the wealthy where activities include swimming, tennis and informal barbecues. Friends and friends of friends are invited without formalities.

The decorations are up and food is being prepared in enormous quantities for a huge party here Friday.

"Make yourself beautiful," Vlasta urged me.

"Do I have to be reminded to do it," I pretended irritation. "Do you mean to say that I need some restoration?"

"Of course not. But you will be the center of attention."

September 24, 1947

I am flabbergasted. Had I read this in a book I would say "impossible," things like these do not happen in real life. But I'd better slow down and start from the beginning.

The party was sensational. I couldn't believe how many old friends were assembled. I was especially pleased to see Misha, who ambled in with his new wife. I was constantly mobbed by people wanting to hear my adventures, my trials, my escapes.

Suddenly my eyes met those of a newcomer, a tall, slim man, faintly familiar. For a second my heart stopped, then started racing at a dangerous

speed. Tomas Munk—Dr. Tomas Munk! I quickly regained my composure. No, it can't be—he is in the Belgian Congo.

He didn't pay any attention to the surrounding guests, but looking straight in my direction he slowly approached me.

"Zdenka!" I nodded in utter confusion. Why, I don't know. We did not talk. My thoughts flashed to our first encounter eons away and I suspect his did the same.

He took my hand and held it to his lips for a long time.

"We will need a thousand and one days to talk about the last nine years," he finally said in a low voice.

I looked at him. The war years had left their mark in his deeply sun-tanned face to which the African jungle must have contributed its share. Yet it only added to his attractiveness.

Tomas remained at my side the rest of the evening.

"I thought of you often but in my wildest dreams I never dared think of seeing you again," he whispered.

We see each other every day. Tomas is in charge of research in tropical diseases at a research center. As for me, at my first interview I was hired as secretary in a big export-import enterprise.

At this point, my dear diary, my faithful companion of my peripatetic wanderings, I have found my safe harbor. I am now closing up to take you to the loving hands of Dr. Tomas Munk.

Finis